

Interview with Richard McKee

Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

RICHARD MCKEE

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

Initial interview date: April 9, 2003

Copyright 2003 ADST

Q: Okay, today is the 9th of April, I think it's Appomattox Day, 2003. This is an interview with Richard McKee. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. Do you go by Dick or do you...?

MCKEE: No, Richard.

Q: Richard. Good for you. Richard, could you tell me when and where you were born and something about your past?

MCKEE: I was born on the 21st of January, 1941, in a town called New Brighton, Pennsylvania, which is a small industrial town, in the Ohio valley, on the border with Ohio. My father was the first in his family to go to a university. The family were small farmers in the hills in Pennsylvania. He went to Penn State, later got a Master's degree from Duke. He started out as a schoolteacher and then became a technical writer, which is what he did for most of his life, and then finally he was an editor. My mother's family were from an industrial town also in western Pennsylvania. Father was primarily Scots-Irish; my mother a mixture of Scots and German.

Q: What was her maiden name?

Library of Congress

MCKEE: Her maiden name was Alma Keller. She went to the public schools in western Pennsylvania and then studied for two years at normal school, as it was then called, and taught for a long time. She finally got her bachelor's degree, and then a master's degree, I think two master's degrees. I lived in western Pennsylvania as a kid. My father worked, after he left school teaching, for Johns and Laughlin Steel. After the Second World War we moved up to Niagara Falls, New York, where I went to the public schools. I graduated from a suburban high school, actually a central school, in Lewiston. In 1959 I got a scholarship from the Gannett people for delivering newspapers. It was enough along with the State scholarships from the New York Regents Board for me to afford four years at Cornell University.

Q: Okay I want to go back here, in your family, was your mother teaching too?

MCKEE: My mother was also still teaching, yes.

Q: Well did, brothers, sisters?

MCKEE: I have an older sister, now retired, who went to Cornell two years ahead of me, got a law degree by correspondence some years later from the University of London and retired from the Justice Department after a long and very illustrious career as a general counsel for the U.S. part of Interpol. My younger brother is a psychologist. He teaches at the University of South Carolina at the medical school and has a private practice. His specialty is children who kill parents and parents who kill children, and he has frequently been called upon to testify in court. He's quoted in a recent issue of U.S. News World Report.

Q: Well this, this shows that, let's talk about your early childhood, what sort of rule did you parents play in this? You know, were they sitting around the dinner table talking about things, I mean what got all of you sort of on these professional careers?

Library of Congress

MCKEE: What we're talking about here really is, if I can distance myself from my parents, which none of us does very easily, you know, is very much upwardly mobile, striving middle class family. No question that education was seen as the key to upward mobility. The emphasis was placed on education, on doing well in school, not at the expense of extracurricular activities, but academics clearly came first. All three of us knew this. We also knew that our parents couldn't afford private universities, so we had to get some scholarships. My sister was so bright that in fact she made money from scholarships in her four years in Cornell, which you can't do anymore. And I certainly was helped by scholarships. My interest in the Foreign Service is traceable back to when I was in junior high school. I think the real root goes back to when we lived in Lewiston, New York when I was growing up. There was a U.S. Consulate at Niagara Falls, Ontario, just across the river. And I would see this U.S. flag flying in Canada, and that sort of intrigued me, and so, from really very early on the career that I wanted was the Foreign Service. And so in that sense I'm quite content. I did what I wanted to do as a kid.

Q: Well let's go back to sort of elementary school boy, you were going to school, really at that point you're up in Lewiston, was that it, in New York. How was the elementary school, any teachers sort of subjects sort of stick out in your mind?

MCKEE: Oh yes, I did up to sixth grade at Niagara Falls, in Niagara Falls there was a system called the informal group, which was kids who were selected for academic achievement, high I.Q., twelve fifth-graders and twelve sixth-graders, learning together. The teacher's name for those two years was Doris Warner. I remember her very well. And again the whole push was that one could do well academically. My mother at the same time was teacher at the other informal group. There were two of them in the Niagara Falls public school system. We moved to Lewiston, which is on the river, and a little bit north of Niagara Falls, as I went into seventh grade. So I did seventh through twelfth grade at Lewiston Porter Central School, which had recently been centralized. Large campus, new buildings, what have you. But still pretty small, my graduating class from high school in

Library of Congress

1959 was a hundred people. There were some truly outstanding teachers. Among the ones that stick in my mind were an English teacher named Laura Thorn, a history teacher named Don Yates. It was really an outstanding education. One thing that struck me was that in going to Cornell and later joining the Foreign Service, I never felt that my high school education was deficient. But we're talking about a central school that drew some suburbanites, some small-town types, and lots of farmers. About fifty percent of the kids in my graduating class went on to something that could be called post-secondary education.

Q: What about things like reading? In your family, was there a lot of reading?

MCKEE: My father was a voracious reader, my mother not so much. He was a technical editor. He had wanted to get a doctorate at one point, from Duke, in English Literature, but that didn't work out, before I was born. So reading was a very, very important activity. Always. And discussion around the dinner table.

Q: What about, in discussion around the dinner table, was there a political cast in your family at all?

MCKEE: Not particularly. My father then was in sort of low-level management, editor of the house magazine for an abrasives company, but very much Republican. We were Republicans on both sides of the family, Scots-Irish Presbyterian on my father's side, out of the hills in Pennsylvania, and skilled worker AFL-CIO on my mother's side. Protestants. And no one should kid himself or herself, in the '30s and the '40s in this country, the Protestant cast of the Republican party and the Catholic cast to the Democratic party.

Q: Well one only has to think of Al Smith running.

MCKEE: There you go. My father's mother was active in Republican politics in Pennsylvania. She was a leader of the group WCTU, Christian temperance which is very much a Protestant operation. So they were Republicans. As I was as a kid, but then I went off to Cornell, and I was influenced by Ted Lowi. He is very distinguished now, a professor

Library of Congress

of government, but then a grad student. I moved over to the other side of the political spectrum where I have stayed ever since. I am devoutly now a paleo-Liberal.

Q: Well what about reading? Thinking as a young boy, what sort of books do you read?

MCKEE: History, historical novels, I can't really say much non-fiction when I was in high school, except for history.

Q: It was also the era of great historical novels too, I mean these were...

MCKEE: Very much so.

Q: You picked up an awful, I mean there were a lot of good historical novels which were very popular.

MCKEE: And my parents had a decent bookshelf in the house, and of course encouraged us to all go in the public library and take out books. I think if you polled FSOs, you'd find that the number that were stamp collectors is very high. I really do. I was a stamp collector.

Q: I noticed this, yes.

MCKEE: I think stamp collecting is a good indicator of future FSO tendencies.

Q: Now I wasn't a stamp collector but I was a map reader. And remember again I'm suddenly, before 1928, I figure, if I really wanted to run away from home, I wanted to go, I'd had it all figured out where I wanted to go. A place called Wake Island, which had I done that at the age of twelve wouldn't have been a very good place to go. But it seemed sort of out there.

MCKEE: My parents actually papered my bedroom when I was in high school in National Geographic maps.

Library of Congress

Q: How wonderful!

MCKEE: For one thing, the quality of the paper was very high, and second it was colorful, and third I did love maps. So this was a great way to stand there and think 'I wonder where Wake Island is, and who lives there, and how the people get there and get off of that place.'

Q: How about in school, what parts of it did you excel in or survive in?

MCKEE: Well in high school I took the academic side, which in upstate New York State meant you took all the Regents exams. I did very well in English, I did very well in history and government and languages. I did poorly in math, and I did poorly in science. I flunked the physics exam and had to take the Regents exam again. I passed it the second time, but just barely.

Q: Sort of like the profile of a good Foreign Service Officer. Extracurricular activities?

MCKEE: Band. I was a bassoonist, that's about it. I'm not particularly athletic. In the '50s, this tends to happen whenever a society feels threatened, gender roles tend to become more rigid than perhaps they usually are. So in the late '50s in high school, boys took shop and girls took home economics and typing. Looking back on my career, I should have taken home economics and typing and to hell with shop. But you just didn't do that in the late '50s.

Q: I remember I took some, print shop, very handy, I learned how to set type by hand.

MCKEE: Hey, that's a skill we all need. I still type damn fast. But it's my own system.

Q: I agree with you. While you were at the high school, did, either at the dinner table discussions or in school, was there, you know talk of, the Cold War was in full swing at this point, and did that?

Library of Congress

MCKEE: I really don't think so. I remember those drills in school, duck and cover, which we now realize would have been totally pointless in the event of a nuclear attack. But unlike I guess a lot of people I never felt somehow threatened by nuclear war. I just didn't think it would happen. So I don't really think that the Cold War was such a feature. On the other hand, two things stand out from when I was a kid. I remember when Truman fired MacArthur. And upstate New York this was...

Q: You would be, were you about ten years?

MCKEE: Yes, I was ten or twelve years old.

Q: I think it was '50...

MCKEE: '53 I think. Or maybe '51?

Q: '52 or something...

MCKEE: But I remember it distinctly. And in upstate New York, people thought that Truman was a traitor. I mean it was a real fight. I don't recall the McCarthyite period and the constraint on free speech. My mother told me recently that when she was teaching, she wrote a letter to President Truman to protest something. I can't remember what it was. She had mentioned it in passing to her principal, and her principal was quite apprehensive. She thought the FBI would come and investigate them and that this was a wrong thing to do.

Q: It gets, a feeling of the spirit of the times, I mean, you know there was a very active political life, but there was always a concern. Well while you were going through High, did you read the paper by the way?

Library of Congress

MCKEE: Well, I delivered the Niagara Falls Gazette for five years, the last two years with a clear eye on this Gannett scholarship, and yes, I read that, I had it read completely when I was a third of the way through the route.

Q: Were world events something that turned you on?

MCKEE: Yes. You know it's curious, I found that there has been a sort of a triple evolution in my reading the newspaper. When I was a kid, I read the world events first, secondly national events, and third local events, and never sports or business. In my professional career of course, I read about world events. I found that national events took more and more of my interest. I've become, as the years have gone on, more and more active politically to the extent one could under the Hatch Act. Now actually I find I turn to the local events first, then national. And world events yes, but it tends to be specialized, places where I served.

Q: Well then, when you were getting ready to graduate from High School, you said you went to Cornell. But was that an actual, or was there a reason for going there?

MCKEE: I applied to, and was accepted in three places. Wisconsin, which I knew had a crackerjack history and government department, Cornell, and Georgetown, for the Foreign Service. I knocked out Wisconsin because it was too far away, and Georgetown because in those days the good fathers tucked you into bed at eleven-thirty at night. I'd had enough of that by the time I was eighteen years old and full of myself. I got these two scholarships from the Regents Board which were applicable only at a university in New York State. Curiously, my sister was then two years ahead of me at Cornell, as I mentioned, but we actually saw each other very little during the two years that we were both on campus.

Q: Cornell, you lived there in what, in the...

MCKEE: Fall of '59.

Library of Congress

Q: '59. What was Cornell like, how did it strike you?

MCKEE: Well, as everyone knows, it's one of the most beautiful campuses in the country, despite some really awful architecture that's come up lately. It struck me as large, competitive, but I made dean's list my first term, so I felt I could hold my own with anybody academically. Challenging. I had very good professors from the outset, Clinton Rossiter was one of the great experts on the American presidency, always liked lecturing to undergraduates, I remember that. Full social life, that should not be forgotten. It was legal to drink at 18 in New York State in those days.

Q: What about courses with an international cast to them?

MCKEE: Oh absolutely, I mean after my freshman year when I knocked off some of the basics, I started in immediately, I did an amazing course in Russian and Soviet history with Professor Fischer. I did any number of history courses, modern European history with professor Edward Fox.

Q: Did the election of 1960 which engaged a lot of college students engage you particularly? That was the Kennedy-Nixon.

MCKEE: Not particularly, I remember listening to the radio or watching on television political conventions going back to '52, when Eisenhower beat Taft. This goes back a long way. The election of '60 engaged me because Eisenhower was seen as very much an old man. I had, by the time elections rolled around in November of 1960, learned a great deal about Richard Nixon, most of which was not very complementary. And of course Kennedy was this handsome dashing romantic young figure. I never went into the Peace Corps, which I regret. I never got involved in the desegregation effort which was just beginning to gather steam when I was at Cornell, which I greatly regret. But Kennedy's emphasis on public service fit right in with my own thinking.

Library of Congress

Q: Was there a feeling in school that public service was 'A good thing?'

MCKEE: Absolutely. No doubt about it. I'll never forget, in the mid-'70s, I had some time off for some reason, and State set me up to go lecturing about foreign policy through the Midwest at small colleges. At that point I had had a couple postings in South Asia. I always got questions about the Foreign Service and about public service generally, and I would say it was the greatest thing going. Students did not have that attitude by the mid-'70s, it was a really major shift, maybe pushed by inflation, maybe by the Vietnam war, I don't know what. Everybody, even the kids, were interested in making money.

Q: Did, while you were at Cornell, were you involved in any activities other than class things?

MCKEE: Oh! Good Lord yes, I wrote for the campus newspaper, I edited, eventually, the campus humor magazine, I got elected to a junior honorary, a senior honorary. I was very active in my fraternity, and even now still go back from time to time.

Q: What fraternity was that?

MCKEE: It was Delta Phi, which was very much an old line fraternity, eastern fraternity. Mostly prep school kids, beautiful old house. I'm conflicted about fraternities, as I think any thoughtful person must be. The positive side as far as I was concerned at Cornell was that the fraternity cut this huge place down to a manageable size, very important, and gave one some initial experiences of leadership and organization. The downside was of course discrimination of various kinds, although I will say that Delta Phi never had any formal discriminatory paragraphs in its charters. While I was there we certainly, we pledged kids from Greece, we pledged kids from Latin America, but nonetheless the essence of the place was preppie, and you knew it.

Q: Did the Foreign Service cross your radar at all while you were there?

Library of Congress

MCKEE: I really was always focused on a Foreign Service career. I majored in government. I was selected for honors and frankly kicked it away, which I probably shouldn't have done. I applied for the Foreign Service. Given the delay in being accepted and also the desire to avoid being drafted, I started law school in Virginia in the fall of '63, I quit that after about a month. I started a master's degree in history in Virginia, which I finished up in January of '65. I joined the Foreign Service on April Fool's Day, 1965.

Q: Did, while you were at Cornell did you come up, have any relations to, I don't know whether it was southeast Asia, and I'm thinking...

MCKEE: What you're thinking of is George McT. Kahin.Q: Is Indonesia...

MCKEE: He was quite well known on campus, certainly a revered figure, later among the very earliest of course to engage in teaching against the Vietnam War. And subsequently I've run into any number of Foreign Service officers who were sent by the State Department to Cornell to take his courses and to study Southeast Asia, but that was not an area that I focused on. I did a course in Latin American history and politics, European, but not Southeast Asia.

Q: Did, how about, things were beginning to move while you were there in Vietnam, did you get any feedback about Vietnam at all at that time?

MCKEE: Well it did begin to move, you know when I got there in '59, the last of the GI Bill guys were still around. Some of them had become sort of permanent students. So there was that reaching back to the Korean War. Clearly Vietnam was becoming more of a concern, but I thought, most everybody I knew thought, that it was the right thing to do. I remember very well our class came into the Foreign Service in April in '65. The big expansion of our presence came in the summer of '65, when we were all still here, pretty much. I can remember only one out of the thirty of us, thirty-odd, saying it's all a

Library of Congress

big mistake, we shouldn't be doing this. Everybody else basically bought the McNamara-Johnson line.

Q: While you were at Cornell, was there a significant subset or whatever you want to call it of campus Marxism, this, many of the professors, at every University, this is a good field to be in, I mean challenge and things and all that.

MCKEE: I remember one professor who was described as a socialist. I think he may later have been elected mayor of Ithaca on the Democratic ticket, and I'm sure there were such people around. But you have to remember, Cornell was actually a pretty conservative place. First of all, the Agriculture School was large, home economics was large, the industrial and labor relations school was named after Irving Lves, the Republican. The architecture school was fairly conservative in a lot of ways. The government department, which is where you expect to find these guys, also had a fairly conservative cast to it. Rossiter I think was known as a Republican. I took his constitutional law course. Walter Berns was in fact a leading intellectual light of the conservatives.

Q: But unlike say, oh, like Wisconsin university or California, which were then, and Columbia to a certain extent, but these were some of the centers where you had...

MCKEE: Absolutely, I think if you very roughly had to put Cornell somewhere in the political spectrum, Cornell of the late '50s, early '60s, it would have to be centered, leaning somewhat to starboard.

Q: Then you went down, you tried law, you sampled law for a couple months.

MCKEE: It was one of the few decisions perhaps that I've never regretted. After about a month of it I said 'Look, this is simply not for me, I don't think the way these people think, and really this is not something I want to do with the rest of my life.'

Q: In that short time could you sort of get the mindset?

Library of Congress

MCKEE: Of lawyers?

Q: Lawyers, yes.

MCKEE: I guess. Anyway, whatever it was I didn't want it and I got out of it. I went back to history where of course it was like putting on an old pair of slippers. *Q: And in getting your master's in history, what area were you in?*

MCKEE: I did mostly 19th, 20th century European. Which is curious because subsequently, in the Service, aside for two years in Geneva, I never served in Europe.

Q: You say you took, while you were at the University of Virginia you took the Foreign Service written exam?

MCKEE: Yes. I came up here, I took the exam at Wilson High School in the District, which seemed to be the closest place to take it. It must have been, going back, it would have been December of '63. It was fairly rigorous. Oddly enough, my previous trip to Washington, DC, prior to taking the exam, had been to drive up for Kennedy's funeral, which I remember very, very well. With a buddy of mine from law school, I drove up in an old car. we knew nothing about Washington, we parked by the Lincoln Memorial. We walked to Capitol Hill. People were singing the Battle Hymn of the Republic. It was quite moving.

Q: What, do you recall the oral exam, I would like to pick up the flavor of the oral exam at different times.

MCKEE: Sure! I was then at the University of Illinois. My exam was set at the Court of Claims building in Chicago. It was a big old building. I was nervous as hell, came up, stayed at my parent's place. They were living in Dupage County, outside Chicago. I went into the city. I remember having a copy of Time magazine - and I had never realized how gauche that was under my arm. They called my name. I went in and I was put in a

Library of Congress

witness box. The examiners were sort of en banc, if you will, the three of them up well above my head in this courtroom. They tried to put me at ease and I suspect that I was somewhat at ease. They asked me various questions. One of them, and clearly I thought the sharpest of them, was from the Department of Agriculture. He asked, I thought really very good questions about things I knew a little bit about, like agricultural subsidies and agricultural trade. I remember of course that they said the object was not to show your factual knowledge. You'd already demonstrated that. It was how you handled yourself and all that malarkey. One of the State Department examiners was a man of some wealth and political connections. I later learned that it was said of him that he could say nothing, because he knew nothing, in seven languages. His questions were certainly pedestrian in the extreme. The ones that stick in your mind: if you were in New Orleans, and went due east, what rivers would you cross? Lord knows what the answer to that was. And the classic of course, if you were on a desert island and you could only have a few things, what would they be and why? When I left the room, I remembered two things. I said 'I don't know' often. I thought that would count terribly against me. I was later told that, in fact, it's better not to wing it. The second thing was that my armpits were really wet, so I must have been sweating. Heavily.

Q: Well, you came in in April 1st, 1965. Can you, what was the composition of your basic officer's course, your A-100 course?

MCKEE: Our class was comprised of 32 people, of whom four were, four or five were USIA. There were only maybe four or five women. No members of what we would now call minorities. Average age, you could look it up, was probably something like twenty-five. You couldn't of course be more than thirty-one in those days. Almost all of us wanted to be ambassadors.

Q: Of this group that, were you talking, you say that the Vietnam war was just on the horizon, or was this a topic?

Library of Congress

MCKEE: Well, it was a topic of conversation, there's no doubt about that. There was concern. President Johnson made the announcement of a major increase in the troop levels, I think it jumped from what, twenty-five thousand to a hundred-thousand. People were concerned, but there was this very strong sense that it was the right thing to do.

Q: How did you find the course? Did it meet your expectations, or did you have any expectations?

MCKEE: The course director was a guy named Garret Soulen, and it was of course a series of talking heads. It mostly took place in Rosslyn. I thought that the accommodations were, you know, it was limited to office space, it was really pretty funny. I got the first sense of the importance of the federal budget in my future when it was announced quite suddenly that our class trip would be to the Port of Baltimore.

Q: Normally you go up to New York.

MCKEE: At least New York! But this was a cutback. Soulen, Garret Soulen actually did a good job, I thought. Brought in good speakers, and made us all, at least once, possibly twice, get up and address the entire class. I have felt for as long as I've been in the Foreign Service that one area which has been neglected, and unfortunately so, is to train people to speak well in public. I think that they should develop programs and devote more resources to doing so. We have some wretched public speakers in key positions in the Foreign Service. Now, when I was in high school I also worked at a state park, Old Fort Niagara, where the Niagara River flows into Lake Ontario. I was a guide. I developed not only fearlessness with regard to public speaking but also a tremendous sense of the power of the microphone, and perhaps that influenced my confidence.

Q: You mentioned that you were at University of Illinois, how long were you there?

MCKEE: As I dropped out of law school at UVA, I bounced around. I went into grad school. They said that, well you can only take nine hours because these courses are really tough,

Library of Congress

so I took only nine hours. Which is a big mistake. I remember going up to New York for a month and coming back and feeling like I hadn't missed a damn thing. And I aced all those courses. But by then the money was running out. My parents were Illinois residents, so Champagne-Urbana was a cheaper place to go. So I went there for summer school, and I remember I took something like ten hours in summer school, and then I took a heavy load in the fall and finished up my master's degree then, in the fall-winter semester. Pretty grim, I mean Champagne-Urbana is, all said and done, a pretty grim place. I had some roommates in an apartment that I didn't like very much. I was really just waiting to get into the Foreign Service.

Q: In, when you came in, were you thinking of any place to go?

MCKEE: You know I hate to say it, but I had at the time massive debts. Can you believe that I owed my parents six hundred bucks for my master's degree? And I really wanted to go to a place where I could make some money. I can't remember what I put in for. My French was pretty good from grade school and high school. Anyway I can't remember whether I put in for La Paz or whether I was sent there or whatever, but I was quite happy because it was a twenty-five percent hardship post and it was exotic.

Q: You went to La Paz when?

MCKEE: I went to La Paz fairly early on, it would have been like November of '65. In other words, I had the A-100 course, the consular course in which I did not do well, four months of Spanish, and I was off to La Paz.

Q: And you were in La Paz from '65 to when?

MCKEE: '66, just a year, because again the budget struck, my second lesson of the importance of the budget in my life. I had done six months in the USO section and six months in the political section. All of us rotational junior officers, were transferred to funded

Library of Congress

positions. I was transferred to Barranquilla, Colombia. Which I had to look up on a map. I didn't know where it was.

Q: Well, in La Paz, what did, how did, what was sort of the situation in La Paz as you saw it?

MCKEE: Well, I was surprised, I remember, that Bolivia had relations with any other foreign country, because we were so important. I was really surprised that they even bothered having relations with places like Britain and Israel and Brazil. We were it. It's really provincial, but somehow it did come as a shock that there were all these other foreign embassies in town. The Embassy itself physically was in the Banco National, an old building with rickety elevators and a buzzer bell that would give you a shock if it was raining. The electricity just was not very well insulated. The Ambassador was a fine man, Douglas Henderson, still alive. His wife Dorothy was a very warm woman. It was his first and as it turned out only ambassadorship. He was very much an ARA type, very distinguished, very nice guy. The DCM was a guy named Bob Hurwich, whom I remember very well. One of his daughters, he had several daughters, got into various kinds of scrapes when he was in Bolivia. But he was, I remember, he was a good DCM. He later got into a lot of trouble. He called all of us junior officers together, he really did look out for us. His own story I remember very distinctly. He'd served in the Army in World War II, and didn't even know that there were embassies, frankly. But he found out, thought it was a good way of life, got into the Foreign Service, worked his way up. I remember him saying 'You know, if you keep your nose clean and work hard, you might get an ambassadorship. But if you don't you will have had a very interesting career.' I liked Hurwich a lot.

Q: Do you recall what was the problem with him later?

MCKEE: I remember distinctly. He later served as DAS for the Caribbean, maybe under Carter, I'm not sure, and then as Ambassador to the Dominican Republic. While he was Ambassador to the Dominican Republic he accepted a piece of land, beachfront property,

Library of Congress

for a dollar from a very prominent Dominican businessman. He started to build what would be his vacation retirement home there, using Embassy labor, using the assistant GSO to supervise. In a very short period of time this came back to Washington. He was called back here, put on trial in at the federal courthouse in Alexandria. Deprived of his pension, I think didn't do any jail time, and quite possibly he was fined as well. A bad ending.

Q: It really is, you wonder what happened. Well, it's sort of obvious you don't do that.

MCKEE: I really, I have a theory about why it happened, but since it's so personal I'd rather not go into it, it involves, essentially involves his family.

Q: Well, did you get out and sort of mix and mingle in the Bolivian society?

MCKEE: Absolutely! One of the best jobs I ever had, in all my years was, that the Ambassador, bless his heart, made me the Secretary of the Ambassador's Emergency Fund Committee. In those days, and I guess the amount hasn't risen much, the Ambassador has twenty-five thousand dollars a year to play with. Now, we had an AID mission there, but this committee existed and everybody in Bolivia knew about it. Groups of campesinos would send in requests for assistance. The maximum grant I think was a thousand bucks, which was a lot of money in those days. 'We've half-finished our school, it's been a bad year, the crops have failed, could you possibly come up with five-hundred dollars so we could put a roof on the school?' The project that I will never forget is this one. Bolivia had a very small winery operation, and there had been floods, and this is all in the pre-cocaine days. The little terraces that kept the vines in place had been destroyed, could we come up with money to repair them? And I would have to go and look at these projects, and it was wonderful, took me all over the country. Q: I always think of Bolivia as having a bunch of miners running around with sticks of dynamite stuck in their belts. I mean, did that, that sort of thing...

MCKEE: Oh, yes, Bolivia had had its social revolution in '52 and tossed out the landowner class, members of the aristocracy who went overseas or moved to the cities of Bolivia.

Library of Congress

Mining was the backbone of the economy. The miners were nearly all in the MNR or parties that were friendly to the Left. Yes, they descended on the major cities from time to time. There were several counterweights politically to the miners. In Santa Cruz province and other provinces down in the flatlands were large landowners who were of course conservative. The church was very weak, unlike in other places in South America. There had been a revolution, I think just before I got there. By then Ren# Barrientos Ortu#o had come in as co-President and then as sole President. But one could still see the marks of the shots on the wall of the University campus.

Q: What about, how did you see the university at that time, Latin American universities sometimes can be places you can't go to, real hotbeds of leftism and all that, was that...

MCKEE: That was pretty much true. The University of San Andr#s, big place, not far from the Embassy. Certainly no-one ever said it was off limits to me, but I never went there, and I had the sense that it was a dangerous place for an American diplomat.

Q: Were there any coups while you were there?

MCKEE: No. Barrientos Ortu#o was in office the entire time I was there. He died, I think, in a helicopter crash. But after I did my GSO stint for six months I was put in the political section. I was asked to watch the Congress, which was a pretty anemic organization. I actually got to know one or two or three of the congressmen very well. I had a marvelous boss, Larry Pezzullo, who I just saw recently, still a truly outstanding person. Q: Who was this?

MCKEE: Larry Pezzullo, Latin Americanist, always wanted to get back to Vietnam, never did as far as I know. Very good Ambassador to Uruguay and then particularly to Nicaragua at the time that the Somoza regime was collapsing. Immensely capable guy.

Q: By any chance, had the Che Guevara thing already gone,

Library of Congress

MCKEE: I missed that, I missed that. He was captured in Bolivia in the spring of '67, by which time I was in Colombia. During the year that I was in Bolivia, I'm pretty sure in retrospect, the CIA knew that he was there, but I didn't know he was there.

Q: You spent basically a year in Bolivia, and then off to Colombia to Barranquilla.

MCKEE: Three officer post, wretched port city. My boss, may he rest in peace, was a drunk. (End of tape)

We were in Barranquilla, I got there in the fall of '66 and stayed there until the Summer of '68, actually. And I was the visa and passports officer. It was a good assignment in many ways. Most distinctly in my mind, in those days the USS Hope, the Hope ships were very much active.

Q: You might explain what they were.

MCKEE: Well this Project Hope was the inspiration of a father and son team of doctors named Walsh. They persuaded the US government to give them two hospital ships, which they then, through charitable contributions, raised money to fix up. They sent these around the world. The idea was that Project Hope, which was headquartered in Winchester, Virginia, would way in advance send out a team to a particular place, Sri Lanka or Colombia or some other place, talk to the local medical establishment, gain its confidence, find out areas in which it could send its ships for ten months, to be essentially a teaching hospital for the local medical establishment. This required a pretty high level of diplomatic skill, by the way. Then the ship would come, it would dock. American doctors would take off a month or two, fly to wherever this was, practice their specialty. Obviously the ship didn't take local folks with colds or broken arms. It took people who had, what was seen as interesting, tropical diseases, or diseases of the area. I think it was usually the tropics. As the vice consul I had to go to Cartagena, Colombia, which was ninety miles away from Barranquilla every other Friday. I would sign seamen on and off the Hope Ship.

Library of Congress

The ships were crewed by Grace and company. Peter Grace being a devout Catholic, as were the Walsh's. Of course Grace and Company was a major U.S. shipping line. I learned how important unions were then. All of these seamen were unionized, and I remember they got about six hundred bucks a month, not counting room and board and clothes, which were provided. I remember thinking to myself at the time that if I had an idiot son I'd work my butt off to get him into the seamen's union, because it was, well, an easy life. The seamen were seamen. The Grace Company management argued that they were essentially a bunch of drunks and malingerers, and certainly that was often the case. The most interesting aspect of it was that they served two month stints on the ship, and then they had to be sent back to Miami, because the ship was just sitting in port. X number of them had to be employed, according to union rules, mostly chipping paint. It was my obligation as the vice consul to make sure that their allowances were paid to various dependants. I learned there that it is really true, that sailors really do have a girl in every port. And I would solemnly check to make sure that Mazie in Panama City got her fifteen dollars, and Amparo in some place, some port in Nicaragua, got her twenty-five dollars, all of this from the same seaman, which I thought was very interesting.

Q: Did, Barranquilla, what was the sort of the center of activity there?

MCKEE: It was a commercial place. Barranquilla is about fifteen miles upriver from the mouth of the Magdalena, where the Magdalena River, a mighty river, drains almost half of Columbia, flows into the Caribbean. There had been a very tiny town earlier, but the entire history of the place dates from 1920. I assume the Colombian government, not the locals, floated a large bond issue, mostly in Chicago. This was subscribed, and it raised enough money to build a large breakwater out into the Caribbean. This made Barranquilla an ocean port. And so shipping was its main occupation. There was industry as well. Really, except for a very few small buildings downtown, all of it dated from the 1920s. Not a particularly attractive city. To the east was Santa Marta, which is a very historical town in

Library of Congress

a very lovely setting. And to the west was Cartagena, which was a fortress of the Spanish Main, in the eighteenth century, again a very dramatic kind of place.

Q: What, other than the care and feeding of the seamen, what other sorts of things were you doing?

MCKEE: I was a visa officer. Almost anybody could scrape up a hundred bucks, which is what it cost to fly from Barranquilla to Miami in those days, so we turned down a lot of visas. I did immigrant visas as well. Occasionally took care of American citizens. We had what we called it the widows' and orphans' fund. Whenever there was money left over from some party or something we'd toss it in there, and we used this money if somebody needed a hotel room for a night, until they'd take the plane out the next morning, didn't have any money. The inspectors came through and said we couldn't keep it, this was all against the regs, so we had to get rid of it, it was unappropriated funds.

Q: Oh, yes. So you were trying to hide it somewhere.

MCKEE: Well, we didn't, I don't know, we didn't hide it. The other thing, I was asked to clear out some old files, and I did so. Bundled stuff off and sent it to Washington. These files actually went back to the '40s, and they were absolutely fascinating, even in the '40s, because of the effort to combat Nazi and Italian fascist shipping and whatever. We had consulates in Cartagena and Santa Marta as well as Barranquilla. The locals told me that they remembered the FBI got in at that time, who were very obvious because they all had brush cuts and wore short-sleeved shirts and ties and nobody else in town did. They also couldn't speak Spanish, which sort of gave them away. But, above all, all the angry correspondence among the three consuls, each accusing the other of giving ten pesos to some American citizen deadbeat, which would have been enough to get him into the next consular district. Really quite humorous.

Library of Congress

Q: I'm a professional Consul, you might say, and 'Oh lord don't let it happen in my Consular district' is the Consul's prayer. And if it does happen you hope that somehow or another it can be moved to somebody else's district.

MCKEE: We were just three, the consul, who was essentially a South Asia expert, his French-Algerian wife, myself. I was then single, got married while I was there. The other vice consul, who went on to a very distinguished career, and whom I saw the other day for the first time in decades, here at DACOR of which he is a member. Also a regional Peace Corps director, a family named Hogan, to whom I was really close, and USIA had a bi-national center director in town. A total of five.

Q: How did you, you know, here you are, young officer, how did you deal with, was he Consular General, or...

MCKEE: Consul.

Q: Consul. How did you deal with your head man with the drinking problem?

MCKEE: It was very difficult. It was one of those situations which has only happened once or twice in my life. In the first interview, I talked to him, he talked to me, and it seemed clear to me from the outset that we wouldn't get along, and essentially we didn't. He was a nervous guy, very concerned about his career, had family problems, drank too much, which is particularly a bad idea in the tropics. Now mind you, up until five years ago I probably drank too much, so it's the pot calling the kettle black. He had a demanding eye in terms of details and respect and all of that. There were two low points. Bob, the consul, had taken the consulate car and driver, a short guy who could barely see over the windshield, and his wife, and was driving to Cartagena. There was this spot in the road where the pavement had given way, and the driver hit that full force, and Bob and his pregnant wife and the driver went head over heels as the car rolled over, off the road. Well, they all recovered, thank God Suzie didn't lose the baby, but I said 'Look, we've

Library of Congress

gotta get rid of this driver.' And I had worked it out with the Consulate doctor, the guy who interviewed the immigrant visa people, that the guy in fact had had TB, and the scars were still on his lungs, and I said to Bob 'Come on, why don't we just let him go. The doctor will say that you never really know with TB, the scars are still very much there. It could become active again.' I had it greased, the admin guys in Bogota were all set, he'd retire, he'd get a pension, and we get a driver who could see over the goddamn windshield.' Bob wouldn't buy it. So we continued to employ that driver. Well, he was driving me to Cartagena some months later, he hit exactly the same goddamn spot in the road and the car rolled over again, and I remember a ballpoint pen went through the soft fleshy part of my hand. We were okay. Incredibly enough, they were able to roll the car back up onto the road and we were able to get back to Barranquilla in some shape, and I was furious. I was scared too, frankly, but I was furious. I went directly to his house, and it was about two blocks from where I lived - unwashed, oil stains, blood, what have you. I knocked on the door. Bob came to the door, he was giving a reception, I said to Bob, 'Exactly the same spot where this guy almost killed your wife, he almost killed me, he's got to go.' Bob's reaction, I shall never forget this, was 'You're bleeding on my carpet.' It was not a happy two years.Q: You mentioned you met your wife there, how did that happen?

MCKEE: No, not really, I met my wife in Bolivia, where she was an FSN, and I proposed marriage to her while we were still there. While I was in Barranquilla, I went through the process of seeking permission to marry an alien, which of course is legally the correct definition. It always reminded me of somebody from Mars. Anyway, the bureaucracy was very slow to move and my fianc#e made wedding preparations. So I remember, I remember distinctly nothing had happened. So finally on a Wednesday I telegraphed them saying 'I'm leaving on Friday to get married on this coming Saturday, Friday night civil ceremony, Saturday church ceremony in La Paz.' And just before I left the Department sent back a cable saying 'Permission to marry granted. Letter follows.' Which I don't think I have anymore, but I had it for years, the copy of this telegram. Bob Carle, who is now dead, been dead for some time, he was my boss. He was this guy that I had a very difficult

Library of Congress

relationship with. But he gave me one piece of advice which was absolutely on the mark and for which I remain indebted to him to this day. He sat me down, just the night before I left, he said 'You know, you're marrying a Latin American woman, and I wish you well.' He said 'I really think you should not make Latin America your Foreign Service career.' And I asked him why. And Bob said 'Look, I'm married to a foreign woman, and I'll tell you, if you marry this woman in Latin America, if you stay in Latin America, the other American wives will make life difficult for her, don't think they won't. Any success that you achieve, there will be those who will say 'Well, he did this because his wife speaks the language and she's from here and she has all these connections that other officers with American wives don't have.' He said, 'I really think you ought to go somewhere else.' And I did, I put in for Farsi, Arabic or Turkish training. Basically it was a way of getting out of Latin America, and I think Bob was right. I pray desperately that things have improved, and I'm sure they have, but when I was there in the late '60s', mid-'60s', there was an awful lot of contempt in the State Department for the Latin Americans. I think some of it verged on racism. ARA was really in a lot of ways a place I didn't want to be.Q: I must say, I sensed this immediately, the sort of thing you pick up in the corridors. Part of it was that if you, I'm not sure it was racism, because I didn't feel that, but I think the problem was that once you went there, sort of a black hole, you never appeared, you never went anywhere else, I mean there are so many posts you could go to, and the other thing was that quite frankly on our Foreign Policy radar it ranked pretty low. I mean Latin America, you know, every once in awhile something might come up but basically when you look at the problems of the Middle East or Asia or even particularly the Soviet Union and all, I mean these were the things that really engaged officers.

MCKEE: I think that's true. I think that people specialize in ARA because Spanish and Portuguese were frankly easy languages to learn. And in those days, this is all pre-drugs and pre-terrorism, except for plane hijacking, it was pretty easy duty. You could save money, have servants in the house. I suspect that people, the Arabists, the Kremlinologists, the NATO types, did look down on ARA. Once you're sort of in there,

Library of Congress

this is another point that bugged me, this is your second Latin American tour. I may be exaggerating here, but you know you do one more, and you'll never get out.

Q: I would consider it a black hole. Did, maybe this might be a good place to stop, do you think, or not? We can do a little more. So what happened?

MCKEE: Oh, I got out! I flew back to Bolivia, got married, my wife came back, spunky woman. Didn't put up with some of the more pretentious ideas of the Consul's wife, but by that point I pretty much had my onward assignment. Out of the three languages I'd asked for they gave me Hindi. This would have been '68, '69. I did Hindi at FSI in Rosslyn. The onward assignment was five years, if you please, in India. I also did Urdu, you know basically the two languages at the spoken level are the same, the two scripts are very different. So I got out, I went to what was then NEA.

Q: Did, was there any particular reason why you pointed at that, I mean this was sort of central Asia, whatever you want to call it, considered Turkish and all that.

MCKEE: Well you know it is interesting, because what I wanted was Persian, Arabic or Turkish, and how I came up with those three I will never know - Farsi, obviously, not Persian. I can't reconstruct the thought process, but you do have to recall that that was still the heyday of CENTO, that was the time of a massive U.S. economic assistance presence in Pakistan and India. Pakistan and India were more on the scope perhaps than Latin America was, to get back to your earlier point.

Q: Well then, you took what, Hindi/Urdu here in Washington?

MCKEE: Forty-four weeks, in Washington.

Q: How did you find it?

MCKEE: Okay. The teachers were reasonably good. The guy who was teaching Urdu was a Sikh, which I thought was rather bizarre. Later I learned, in fact, people from the

Library of Congress

Punjab of a certain age actually often did know Urdu quite well, so it wasn't as bizarre as it seemed to me. And I went off to India really with a great sense of enthusiasm, with a sense of maybe a second start in the Foreign Service.

Q: Did you find, you're the new boy on the block, you're coming in, did you find, was there a subcontinent corps of Pakistan, India...

MCKEE: Absolutely, sure, sure.

Q: Sri Lanka, I guess it was Sri Lanka by that time.

MCKEE: Yes, pretty much. *Q: And Afghanistan people, I mean was there a corps?*

MCKEE: There was, there was. There was a little bit of a feeling that they were sort of second class in NEA, because of course the real hotshots in NEA were always doing Arab-Israeli stuff. But yes, within the bureau, of the three Deputy Assistant Secretaries, one was always the guy with South Asian experience, I met Howie Schaffer early on, and our friendship has gone on now these many decades. We still see each other from time to time. And you know he was of course a major figure in the Foreign Service in dealing with what was then called the Indian Subcontinent, but which is now called South Asia. And he certainly influenced me positively with regard to a post in India.

Q: Well where'd you go, your first post?

MCKEE: It was all New Delhi, I was in New Delhi for five years, '69 to '74.

Q: Well I think this might be a good place to stop, we'll stop at this point and we'll pick it up next time, you're going out in what year now? '60...

MCKEE: '69, summer of '69.

Library of Congress

Q: '69, good. And we'll talk about New Delhi, and we'll mention, if you were picking up, while you were there, taking Urdu and all, were you picking up, well I can ask you now, were you picking up any emanations of the Vietnam war, I mean things, you'd been away, did that?

MCKEE: Oh, yes, it was a hell of a year, '68, '69 was a hell of a year in Washington. There were demonstrations practically every day, and clearly opposition to the war had come front and center.

Q: What, did you get involved in any of this, or were you sort of a political observer on the side, or busy doing other things?

MCKEE: Well, you know, I took my responsibilities very seriously. Later, when I became a supervisor, more than once had to remind subordinates that when you're working for the U.S. government, privately you can voice your doubts, but you had to be very careful about who you voice those doubts to. Publicly you support the policy.

Q: Okay. So we'll pick this up in 1969, you're off to New Delhi. Great.

Today is the 28th of May, 2002. We're off to New Delhi in 1969. How long were you in New Delhi?

MCKEE: Five years.

Q: Good God! To '74? I don't know, maybe we'll come here, but how did this assignment come about?

MCKEE: I had mentioned earlier to you that I got very good advice from my boss in Latin America about marrying a Latin American woman, which was to get the hell out of Latin America. Wanting to do so, I remember very distinctly putting in to study a hard language,

Library of Congress

Arabic, Farsi, or Turkish. As the roll of the dice would have it, it was Hindi, and also Urdu, so I did that for a year in the old, unventilated, ill-lit buildings rented by FSI in Rosslyn.

Q: In the garage.

MCKEE: No, this was actually above the garage. I remember that I was up, several floors up, still pretty grim surroundings. But then after that year, I qualified in Hindi and Urdu actually, at a low level. I think the Hindi was 3/3, and the Urdu was 2/2. The assignment was for four years to New Delhi. As things worked out, I stayed an extra year because Daniel Patrick Moynihan came and I was having a lot of fun. So I stayed, all told, five years.

Q: Okay. Well let's see, 1969, what was the situation, let's talk about India when you went there, both vis a vis relations with the United States and India in the world and internally.

MCKEE: Well, India at that point, politically, was still recovering from the death of Nehru and then the death of Prime Minister Shastri, who had succeeded him and lasted only about fifteen months before dying in Tashkent. Mrs. Gandhi had been chosen by the Congress Party barons to lead the party. They were thinking that she was some malleable young lady, and she turned out to be indeed far from that. But when I was there she was asserting herself. For example, soon after I got there she decreed that the Congress Party government would end the privy purses that were given out to the princes. This was seen as a sharp move to the left. She had never been fond of the United States. She in many ways had both rightist disdain for our sort of humble-jumble society, and of course she had a leftist disdain, maybe a socialist disdain for our economic system. But nonetheless, relations at that point were very good. Chester Bowles was still Ambassador. He was very popular. The Peace Corps had over seven hundred volunteers in India. The AID mission was all over, including in about a half a dozen state agricultural universities with teams from some of our state agriculture universities. There was a program between the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the Indian Institute of Technology in

Library of Congress

Kanpur, which was going very well. All of this in the context of a contest with the Soviets for the affections of the Indians. However, as the situation went from bad to worse in East Pakistan, culminating in essentially the disenfranchisement of the East Pakistanis before Bhutto became Prime Minister, when Yahya Khan was still there. Hundreds of thousands of refugees poured into India. And we, in that famous phrase, tilted toward Pakistan in that conflict.

Q: Well I'd like to go back earlier, before the '69, what, when you went out there, what was your job?

MCKEE: That was actually curious. I was supposed to be an economic officer, but I was hauled into the front office to be the Staff Aide to the Staff Aide to the Ambassador. The Staff Aide was Richard Viets, and the Ambassador was Chester Bowles. And that's what I did. Bowles left and Ken Keating came, but I stayed in that position for about six months. I was not really very successful in it, and shifted over to the economic section, the section where I spent about a year and a half.

Q: What, when you arrived in '69, what was the perception of Indira Gandhi, from our perspective?

MCKEE: I don't think Americans had a very clear view of Indira Gandhi at that point. Nixon made a visit, he came to India, soon after he was elected he came to India in '69, but it was pretty clear that he and Mrs. Gandhi did not get along well. I think the U.S. government saw her as a possibly transitory figure on the left and not well disposed to the United States.

Q: Did the Vietnam war, this is at the very height of the anti-Vietnam business, did that, how did that play out when you arrived?

MCKEE: Well, it was a very negative factor. I mean the Indians thought that we were dead wrong and had no compunctions about telling us so. That certainly didn't go down well in

Library of Congress

Washington.Q: Did, how did, what was your impression of Chester Bowles and how he dealt and perceived the Indian government at that time?

MCKEE: I was there only at the very end, and I don't think our tours overlapped by more than six or eight weeks, so I'm really hesitant to say anything. He was an iconic figure. He'd been Ambassador before, certainly loved it. He was a controversial figure, as was Steb, his wife, in the American community. Steb always dressed in a sari and there was a sort of going native feeling about them, and it went down badly with an awful lot of Foreign Service Officers.

Q: It's almost a tradition of our Ambassadors very much of serving the Indian side of things and all. Was that something that we were seeing, do you think?

MCKEE: Oh, I think that that was perceived in Washington, yes. I think that our reporting, our political and economic reporting was seen as being unduly generous to the Indians. We had a huge AID mission there, there were a lot of jobs on the line. So it did color the quality of the reporting.

Q: I might add that I saw reports that, there was a feeling today where tensions were extremely high between India and Pakistan that our embassies seemed to be dueling with each other, the one in Islamabad and the one in New Delhi. Was there all that feeling when you got there?

MCKEE: Absolutely. One was seen as either an Indian partisan or a Pakistani partisan, and that played out between the two embassies. As the conditions in East Pakistan deteriorated, that became stronger and stronger. You had the Embassy in Delhi reporting that the Indians were being forced by the influx of refugees and by the need to secure their eastern border to take steps which would effectively assist the rebels. Our Ambassador, Joe Farland in Islamabad at that time, was very close to the Yahya Kahn, who was telling him that it would all be over shortly and it was just a bunch of disgruntled malcontents.

Library of Congress

Q: How did you find, as a Staff Assistant to the Staff Assistant, how did you find dealing with the, did you get involved with the Indian Foreign Ministry or the bureaucracy down there?

MCKEE: Not at that time, I did later on when I was in the political section, and the economic section, but I didn't as a Staff Aide.

Q: By the way, you mentioned MIT and the Indian...

MCKEE: Institute of Technology at Kanpur.

Q: Were we seeing at that time India as being one of the world's great repositories of sort of engineering minds and scientific minds or not?

MCKEE: No, no, I think that was a much later perception. I think at that time India was seen as, and this is very much a fallacy, as democratic India that was the response to Communist China. By assisting India we were showing that a democracy could also deliver the goods.

Q: How did we see, the sort of marriage between the Soviet Union and India was seen to be, not a marriage made in heaven, they seem to be on different sides, it almost seems like they were, the relations between the two seem to be more designed as against the United States than you know a natural liking for each other.

MCKEE: Well I think that's true, the linkage between the two was very much an elite thing. It goes back to Nehru, who visited the Soviet Union in the '20s or in the '30s. There was this sort of romantic Fabian leftism, anti-imperialist rhetoric and what have you. And then after the '60-'62 war between India and China, Russia, the Soviet Union, was very much seen in New Delhi as the counterbalance to China, and later also to Pakistan. One of my jobs was to put together this massive report on East Bloc economic and technical assistance to India every year. No question in my mind that the Russian technicians and

Library of Congress

their families, Russian diplomats, were seen as racist and cheap and were generally quite unpopular. The more sophisticated Indians realized that they were getting second rate technology, that they could get better technology from the United States. But we had declined after a long almost theological fight to permit one of our steel companies to transfer technology for a steel mill to India, and that still rankled. The decision that had been made in the mid-'60s then, but the bitter residue certainly was still there. The Russians built two steel mills for the Indians.

Q: In those days steel mills were considered to be the crown jewels or whatever, they were a great project, they looked big, and they employed a lot of people.

MCKEE: Exactly. Even if, as in the case of India, it was cheaper to import the coal from Poland than it was to use Indian coal, and the economics of it didn't really make much sense.

Q: Did you, when you arrived at the embassy, was there a strong cadre of what you would call Indian hands or was there a cadre of subcontinent hands?

MCKEE: Subcontinent hands, but there were some very impressive people there. Herb Hagerty was in his second or third tour there, Grant Smith had been raised there. His father was an AID officer. A very distinguished guy, his name has escaped me now, had the burdensome title of Minister Counselor for Economic and Political Affairs. Later went on to be Consul General in Munich.

Q: Well the sort of the love affair was more at the Ambassadorial level than within the ranks or not? Was the Ambassador kind of set the tone?

MCKEE: Well Bowles certainly was a romantic about India, I think. And then he left, and of course Ken Keating came. Ken was a very different kind of figure, but there were certainly people in the AID mission and in the embassy who were emotionally committed to the success of India, and economic development.

Library of Congress

Q: You moved there for about a year to the economic section?

MCKEE: A year, year and a half.

Q: When was that?

MCKEE: Well let's see, I arrived in the summer of '69, it would have been in early '70, and I probably stayed for the summer of '71, so about a year and a half.

Q: What was your impression of the economics that were driving India?

MCKEE: Well I think I, I think I shared the general appreciation that, as Patrick Moynihan who later became Ambassador, said, socialism is a luxury that only rich countries could afford. India really couldn't afford this sort of state socialist autarkic system that was prevalent there. There is a very strong memory in my mind. There was a Sikh entrepreneur, Manmohan Singh. Not the very well known Manmohan Singh, but another Manmohan Singh. But he was a Carrier, air conditioning, refrigeration representative in India, and was once called upon to testify before a committee of the Loksabha, which was my main beat. I covered domestic politics.

Q: The Loksabha being...MCKEE: Being the lower house of the Indian Parliament, the House of the People. And about joint ventures and partnership and things like that. And I actually got to sit in on the session as an observer committee, I thought it was really fascinating, because here was this very sharp entrepreneur-capitalist, very much at home in the West, explaining to fairly ignorant Members of Parliament, but also others who were quite committed ideologically that just because you put in fifty-one percent of a venture didn't mean that you ran it, ran roughshod over the representatives of forty-nine percent. It wasn't like a democratic system where fifty-one percent gives you total control. Then there was the whole question about technology transfer, which these parliamentarians clearly envisioned as, "You pay some money and then somebody gives you a whole bunch of documents and then you go out and do stuff." They really didn't have a clue about how

Library of Congress

dynamic a process it was. Manmohan Singh kept it up, and it was clearly missionary work, because except for very small minority communities like the Parsis, most didn't have a clue when it came to the larger market-oriented world.

Q: In a way, almost somewhat unlike the Chinese, who seem to have this sort of thing at their finger, many of them have it at their fingertips.

MCKEE: Part of it may be that the way the caste system works, very gruesome. Some groups do one thing and some groups do another, those who do politics, some do economics. Those who do export-import trade in Bombay or in the ports don't do agriculture production. I don't know, but certainly there were, because there were very sophisticated people in terms of the Indian merchant community, and like the Chinese there were diaspora Indians with whom you could set up relationships. Actually the foreign trade of both countries considered as a percentage of GNP was a joke.

Q: Well this is deliberate, wasn't it? It was self-production and self internal-selling and that sort of thing.

MCKEE: Import substitution was a huge theme when I was there. I often thought that precious foreign exchange was always one word in Indian-English, because you never saw foreign exchange without the adjective "precious." The idea that we should be self-sufficient and not depend on the west for anything.

Q: Were you seeing India as having something that if they were to take sort of government controls off they could take off, or at that point was the economy such that, they weren't ready for that?

MCKEE: I think that the feeling was very strongly that if they took off the controls, the economy would take off. There were some true success stories, but not so much in the industrial-commercial field. The introduction of triple-dwarf wheat by American AID experts in Punjab meant that every year the harvest was up by fifteen to twenty percent from what

Library of Congress

it had been. But one of the underlying reasons for that was land reform. In East Punjab, as opposed to Pakistani Punjab, there were very few farms that were larger than forty acres, and they were intensively farmed. Land reform, particularly in Punjab and then in western Uttar Pradesh, was carried out in a way that ensured that those who received the land also received capital and fertilizer and technical assistance. It was not just enough to give a peasant a piece of land, they'd lose it in no time. You've got to give them all these other things as well, make them available.

Q: Well, were you there when there was the shift from being a food deficit country to a food surplus country?

MCKEE: Yes, yes. In the mid-'60s, we had shipped massive amounts of grain to both India and Pakistan because the monsoon failed two years in a row, and certainly by the early '70s, '71, India was self-sufficient in grain.

Q: Did, was this the beginning of that monumental surplus of counterpart money and all?

MCKEE: Well the counterpart money was really built up in the '60s by the shipments of grain. I think I may have mentioned the great accomplishment of Daniel Patrick Moynihan as Ambassador was to reach an agreement whereby those funds were dissipated over a relatively short period of time, about ten or twelve years.

Q: Was that, when you were dealing with sort of the economy of the relations, was that seen as sort of an indigestible problem?

MCKEE: Oh, absolutely, and especially after the Indo-Pakistan War, when of course our relations reached rock bottom. The Left and the Congress and the two-odd Communist Parties beat us over the head with the PL-480 rupees every day.

Q: Well now, when did you move to the political section?

Library of Congress

MCKEE: I must have moved to the political section in summer of '72.

Q: Well then let's go back to the '71 war.

MCKEE: Maybe '71, my memory's not...

Q: Well let's talk about the '71 war, how did, was there a feeling within the Embassy and with yourself and all that eventually, I mean this thing can't last, India can't sit by and watch this and it was almost inevitable that they would get involved?

MCKEE: Oh, very much so. And we were privy to the reporting coming out of our Consulate General in Dacca. Who was there...?

Q: Arch Blood.

MCKEE: Arch Blood was there. And it was very clear that conditions in East Pakistan were going from bad to worse. To some extent I'm sure that RAW, the Indian intelligence agents, exacerbated the situation. In many ways they really didn't have to. The Pakistan Army was doing quite enough on its own to exacerbate it. And I think the sentiment in the Embassy was that the Indians were forced to intervene finally in December of '71.

Q: How, how did that, it was done rather quickly, wasn't it?

MCKEE: Once the Indian Army intervened, I think it was done in a manner of six weeks.

Q: Was there concern, did this spill into the other borders with West Pakistan?

MCKEE: Well I've never been quite sure how that would have happened. Certainly Henry Kissinger was quite concerned that the Indians would move across and would move into West Pakistan, but for whatever reason Indians decided not to do so. Possibly because we sent our aircraft carrier, I think it was the Enterprise, into the Bay of Bengal.

Library of Congress

Q: How did that tilt towards Pakistan affect, sort of the carrier came and all that. Was there sort of a freeze on contacts, did it have any real effect that you saw?

MCKEE: Social relations were occasionally bad. I remember one night that I drank too much and actually decked an Indian journalist who, I thought was getting obnoxious about Vietnam and Bengal and all of that. The Indians had a very professional Foreign Service. Obnoxious sometimes, and condescending, but professional, so there was every effort made to maintain a sort of civility. *Q: Did, was there any concern on behalf of the American community in the Embassy during the war that you...*

MCKEE: Oh, absolutely. First of all, we all had to cover up our windows with black paper or black paint. Ditto with the headlights of our cars. The Australians were so afraid of being taken for Americans that they sort of had large Australian flag decals that they put on their cars. We were very unpopular.

Q: Did, was there, I don't want to say rebellion, but was there unhappiness in the Embassy because of that sort of pro-Pakistan on the part of Henry Kissinger and company?

MCKEE: I really don't recall. It's logical to infer that but I don't recall it.

Q: Part of the reason behind our siding with Pakistan was to show civility to China.

MCKEE: We know now.

Q: We know now. But you didn't know then.

MCKEE: It's really inconceivable. I mean it's not for nothing that "Nixon to China" has become a stock phrase in politics.

Q: What about as an economic officer, how did you find your Indian counterparts, do you remember...

Library of Congress

MCKEE: My specialized, special area shows you how elaborate the Embassy staffing was and how large in those days. My special area was into two fields, one was the Soviet bloc economic assistance, and the other one was barter trade, what was called rupee trade. So many pairs of badly made Indian shoes for so many Russian tanks that didn't fire straight. I did a lot of writing on essentially non-monetized trade.

Q: Were you sort of able to, in some way or another get a feel about the shoddy goods that were being created?

MCKEE: Oh, yes, they were quite visible. At one point, the state trading agency, one of many, had cut a deal with the Bulgarians, and in return for some product that they sent to Bulgaria they got back all of this Bulgarian brandy which was undrinkable stuff. Whenever you went to the state hotel, that's what they tried to get you to take, because they had boxcars full of the stuff.

Q: How about, what sort of social relations did you find, were you able to make good contact or was it a time when you were kind of being frozen out socially?

MCKEE: No, my memory is that social contacts remained very strong. Yes, occasional sharp exchanges, but Indians quite willing to take refuge in that old line 'We like you, it's your government we can't stand.'

Q: Did you feel there was much understanding on the part of Indians into what made the United States tick, I mean the Indians who counted?

MCKEE: I think there wasn't much understanding. The great change in the Immigration Act took place only in '66, '67, and so the impact had not at all been felt.

Q: Prior to that I think there were a hundred...

MCKEE: Hundred a year.

Library of Congress

Q: Hundred a year. In the whole Asia-Pacific triangle.

MCKEE: It was per country, but it was a hundred a year for India, a hundred a year for Pakistan. And of course the changes that took place in the '60s then opened the way. By '69, '70, '71 the brain drain had become a concern in India. It was more brain drain towards Europe, particularly England, than there was brain drain towards the United States.

Q: Well Indians with wealthy family were sending their sons to England for education.

MCKEE: Still. Yes. I think that was beginning to change even at that time. Again the impact of something like having Ohio State people at the state university. MIT, had a tremendous trickle-down effect on the way that Indians thought, but they were a typical post-colonial society in that sense, educationally.

Q: When you moved to the political section, what piece of the action did you have?

MCKEE: Domestic politics, almost everything except Kashmir, coordinating the reporting of the three consulates general. It was a marvelous job.

Q: Oh, I would think it would be.

MCKEE: Traveled a lot. I was myself responsible for reporting on state politics in the Delhi consular district, which was a big job. There were very bright officers in the consulates, Peter Burleigh in Calcutta, for example.

Q: Was Karelia, is that the way you pronounce it, or Karalla, was that a place we were looking at closely because it was communist?

MCKEE: Kerala was famous as the first governmental unit to vote in a Communist government a free election. It had much more to do with the caste and communal character of the province than it had to do with Communism. Kerala was a particular concern. We

Library of Congress

had a library at Trivandrum. USIS had a library there, that was part of the Madras consular district. It was a place that did get a lot of attention.

Q: Did we see, were we concerned about a communist, increasing communist influence in India, or did we see it sort of as almost a self-sealed political system?

MCKEE: The latter, I think. For one thing, the Communist Party was split in two between the pro-Moscow and the pro-Chinese tendencies. And there certainly were any number of leftists in the congress. I remember meeting V. K. Krishna. There was a feeling that they would not prevail. For awhile, we got rather romantic about this Swatantra party, which was a right-wing party, not right-wing in the Hindu nationalist sense, but right-wing in terms of free enterprise. And they, they actually did reasonably well in a couple of elections.

Q: What was our impression at the time of the importance of religion as a political influence?

MCKEE: Oh, I laughed at this recent "Foreign Service Journal" piece where this guy argues that we should have religious attach#s, religious affairs attach#s, because I think we were acutely aware of the importance of religion. For one thing, we knew very well that Gandhi had very deftly manipulated religious symbols in order to mobilize the Hindu masses against the British. The spinning wheel, the technique of self-sacrifice and all of that. And then of course we were quite aware of Hindu-Muslim tensions. Not in Kashmir at that time, but very much in other parts of the country. I remember once I had to go down to the front office. I enjoyed sitting down with Patrick Moynihan and explaining that in Uttar Pradesh only maybe fifteen percent of the people were Muslims, but then they're split between these two major groups. I was going on and on, getting mired very much in the details. But one of the great things about Moynihan, because of his own love for local politics in New York and Boston and elsewhere was that, he was quite willing to get down to the complexities in politics.

Library of Congress

Q: How about Kashmir, was that playing much of a role when you were there?

MCKEE: Well it certainly was a bone of contention between the two countries, it was an area that first Harmon Kirby and then Grant Smith reported on, because it was a sort of a function of the Indian-Pakistani relationship. We kept an eye on politics in Kashmir. There wasn't much violence, if any, at that time. For us Embassy staffers it was a great place to go on holiday. The Ambassador could not go, as I recall. The State Department held that if he were to go it would be seen as showing that we endorsed the Indian claim, which we didn't. We didn't endorse anybody's claim.

Q: But you could all take, go get your houseboat on the Lake of Kashmir.

MCKEE: And did so.

Q: I guess India and Pakistan were so involved in East Pakistan and Kashmir, off the radar almost?

MCKEE: I guess, yes, certainly it was called a cease-fire line, there was a U.N. presence in Kashmir from '47 onward, and even though the '65 war had been essentially over Kashmir, in the early '70s it was Bengal that was the focus of tensions.

Q: Was there any thought, or anybody talking about India maybe taking over east Bengal? I mean, East Pakistan?

MCKEE: Certainly there was, I think the Pakistanis played on that fear. We were always sort of skeptical in the Embassy, because essentially it would have meant adding forty or fifty million Muslim voters. What would be the point? Bengal was already a difficult problem; a united Bengal would be an even more difficult problem. And there was so much bad blood between the Hindu Bengalis who had left and the Muslims there.

Q: This is talk, but my analysis, it probably wasn't going to happen.

Library of Congress

MCKEE: It probably was not gonna happen.

Q: How did you find, when you were a political officer, getting around and talking to local politicians and all this?

MCKEE: Very easy. As I talk to young Foreign Service Officers setting out at the receptions that we give our A-100 classes, one of the few things I lament, but one of the things I do lament, is that it was so much more difficult everywhere to have that kind of fairly free and easy exchange with host country nationals, which was very much the rule thirty years ago.

Q: Part of it's travel money...

MCKEE: Part of it is travel money, but most of it is security. And to some extent, in particular parts of the world, the Muslim world for example, it is a really sharp increase in anti-Americanism.

Q: Did events in Vietnam, but you left before the collapse came.

MCKEE: That's right, the collapse was in '75.

Q: But the peace treaty, did that seem to, these accords, did that seem to help relations with India at the time?

MCKEE: Well, I think so, but, really, realistically we were in the doghouse for quite a long time after '71. And you remember the whole infrastructure was shot away, the Peace Corps left, the agriculture university people left, the AID mission became a shell of its former self, and by then our relations became very thin indeed.

Q: Was this basically Indira Gandhi, was this the economics, or what was driving this?

Library of Congress

MCKEE: Nationalist sentiment very broadly. We had backed the wrong horse in 1971 and we should be made to pay for it. But Mrs. Gandhi had moved into her most autocratic stage at that point. Let's see, I think, I can't remember now whether her two-year emergency started or ended in '77, but she was moving towards this period of essentially declaring herself Empress of India.

Q: Well then, well you left there in '74. Did you consider yourself by that time a sub-continental hand or something?

MCKEE: Oh, one of my superiors wrote a very flattering efficiency report. He called me "Mr. India." And after five years I sort of did feel like Mr. India. Although there were other people whose knowledge was much greater than mine.

Q: Well where'd you go then?

MCKEE: Well that was interesting. A lot of people said I should have gone back to Washington, but I had a chance to go to Karachi, and so that's where I went, as political officer. And all of a sudden I was in a much smaller fish pond. I enjoyed the two years in Karachi, but I won't say they were years of tremendous challenge. Throughout my career I avoided Washington. And others have said, and it's I think probably true, my career would probably have been better for it. On the other hand I didn't like working in Washington.

Q: Well I think, too, I was in the service at the same time, there are a great many of us who did everything we could to stay away from Washington, and those that came back and got at a desk, Staff Assistants and all probably did better. I mean this is what you do, but the fun was abroad, at least at that time it was.

MCKEE: It went back to 'Why did you join the Foreign Service? What was your primary motivation?' And I don't think mine was ever really to make policy. Mine was to learn

Library of Congress

foreign languages and to try to get into the knickers of foreign society. That's a very fun thing.

Q: Well then you were in Karachi from '74 to '76?

MCKEE: Very pleasant years.

Q: Sounds odd because today going to Karachi would not be pleasant. What was the situation?

MCKEE: Our relations with Pakistan were pretty good, but that wasn't the problem. Nice house, nice beach house, small and primitive but acceptable, good bosses, manageable portfolios, just Karachi and Sind and Baluchistan. Chances to travel, what's not to like?

Q: Who was the consul general?

MCKEE: Oh, Gordon Tiger, and then Moore, John Moore came for the second year. Both could manage, but the one I still see occasionally and admire very much was Gordon.

Q: What was his name?

MCKEE: N. Gordon Tiger. He's still very much alive and well...

Q: Tiger? T I G E R?

MCKEE: T I G E R.

Q: Is he here in Washington?

MCKEE: Yes. Member of DACOR, good guy.

Q: The capital of Pakistan was where by this time?

Library of Congress

MCKEE: It was Islamabad, if you please. The first few buildings had gone up in Islamabad, and so it was actually there. It wasn't, if memory serves, it wasn't in Rawalpindi, and it wasn't up in the hills in Murree, it was in Islamabad. That's certainly my memory.

Q: Who was Ambassador at the time?

MCKEE: Oh, Henry Byroade.

Q: He was quite a figure.

MCKEE: He was quite a figure. That was about the seventh or eighth dictatorship to which he'd been Ambassador. And he was very good, he got along well with Zulfikar Bhutto, and really, in a lot of ways, was a very impressive guy.

Q: The head of the Pakistan government was Bhutto?

MCKEE: Yes. He was still very much in charge. He had once been seen as almost the hope of Asia, and with more than a bit of a leftist following. He was moving steadily right, embracing the feudal interests and the commercial interests, and becoming increasingly oppressive. He set up a force, called, I think, the FSF, the Federal Security Force, which was essentially a bunch of thugs that beat up people that Bhutto didn't like. And he was losing support among the Islamists, not ever having had tremendous support among them.

Q: Well was there, did you sense when you got to Pakistan that there was a real problem of a country that had lost a significant part of its territory and population and had been beaten in the war, you know, resentment and all that built up?

MCKEE: Well myself, I always said, well what is the *raison d'être* for Pakistan now? There are now more Muslims in India or in Bangladesh than there are in Pakistan, so in what sense is Pakistan a sort of home for the Muslims of the subcontinent? But I must say the Pakistanis didn't seem to see it that way. There were a number of rationalizations. One

Library of Congress

was that East Pakistan had been a huge economic burden on the West Pakistan, which I think is an arguable point. An awful lot of Pakistani exports came out of East Pakistan, jute particularly. There were also the argument that they were lousy Muslims anyway. So there's a certain amount of sour grapism going on, and there was certainly enough anti-Indian animus to keep the country going.

Q: Did you feel that, coming from the Indian perspective, was not being Indian sort of the definition of Pakistan or being Pakistani? MCKEE: That was a lot of it. It was essentially a reactive identification. It raises the fascinating point of course of a country whose ethos is essentially negative. How do you get anywhere with that? Pretty hard to do. You need a positive...

Q: Canada has a problem.

MCKEE: Yes. Always had. The only thing we can say really about Canadians is that they're not American.

Q: Yes, and then they have the French enclave which has not been digested.

MCKEE: It can be enough, it can be a basis enough on which to build a policy, but it always struck me as sort of a weak calling, but...

Q: The, how did you find the Pakistani civil service in which you were dealing, were they...?

MCKEE: Good on the surface, good English, seemingly competent, District Commissioners in rural areas, as in India, still had tremendous powers. But even at that point the corruption which would later become endemic was certainly gaining strength. I think it was because public sector salaries lagged so far behind the private sector. One of the interesting things about India and Pakistan was that they were two countries that did control the value of the rupee. These were not countries in the '60s and '70s and '80s

Library of Congress

anyway which had had the kind of rampant inflation that you had in a lot of other places. But still, corruption was an increasing problem in Pakistan.

Q: Well this is, so many of these countries where you don't pay your civil servants, they have to get money to sustain themselves and, they get their, essentially extract fees for services performed. MCKEE: Oh, yes. One of the great distinctions between East and the West, very, very broadly, brutally broadly, is that in the West you pay bureaucrats bribes to do things that are against the law, while in the East, you pay bureaucrats just to do the job that they're supposed to be doing, which is rather different. Once in my second tour in Pakistan, much later, I had a friendly talk with a young Pakistani civil servant who was way out in the boonies. His family was living with his mother, that is her mother in law, in Lahore. He said that the only real question was in what areas were you going to be corrupt, and to the extent, and in what areas that you were going to hold the line. There was no question that you could live on your salary.

Q: Did, in Karachi, as you were, you were doing Political Affairs, how did Karachi as an entity view Bhutto and what he was up to?

MCKEE: Negatively. In those days, the majority, this is true today, in Karachi, were Muhajir's people whose parents, grandparents had come from India. They are only native Urdu speakers in Pakistan, the only native speakers of the national language. They live in Karachi, and also in Hyderabad, Sindh, which was the second city of Sindh province. Bhutto was seen very much as a Sindhi landlord. The Urdu speakers voted for Jamaat-i-Islami or one of the other religious parties. This was before the Muhajir Quami Mahaz, Mohajapalmi Mahaz, came into being. They did not vote for Bhutto and they did not like Bhutto.

Q: Were Muslim fundamentalists seen as an important element at that point?

MCKEE: Certainly the Bhutto people treated them pretty much with contempt. They were not seen as an important element at that time. In '76, '77, as Bhutto moved to court the

Library of Congress

Gulf money, the Gulf Arab states, by building gambling houses and what have you, their negative power increased. They never had, and to this day the religious parties have never received, more than five or ten percent of the vote, and all of that in the cities. But what they have is the power to bring down governments by mounting street demonstrations in the cities their negative power grew as Bhutto became both more oppressive and increasingly was seen as selling out the country to these Arab sheikhs.

Q: Were you seen as being too close to the Bhutto government?

MCKEE: Hmm. Good question. From the Karachi perspective, the answer depended on whom you talked to. If you talked to a People's Party man, fine; if you talked to an opposition person, obviously the feeling was that we should be more even-handed. There was also a fascinating little tribal insurgency in Baluchistan, precisely in that '74 to '76 period. Bhutto tried, initially, to bring civilization to Baluchistan, which meant there would be some clinics and schools. Some of the tribal chiefs realized that this was a very bad idea from their perspective. They teamed up with the Daud Khan, who was in power in Kabul. He had laid claim to this greater Pashtunistan, which basically was about a third of Pakistan including all of Baluchistan. There were ongoing skirmishes in the hills in Baluchistan, and one Pakistani general who had earlier been known as the Butcher of Bangladesh became known as the Butcher of Baluchistan. His name escapes me now. He was Governor of Punjab at one point in Pakistan.

Q: Did you find from Karachi that there was a much more... It was a port and traditionally had been one of the major entrees into the Middle East. Was there sort of a different attitude of openness towards the world? Was it different than you had seen in New Delhi and all?

MCKEE: Well I think so. Very sharp contrasts, in fact. Feeling of self-sufficiency in India, feeling of ours is one of the three or four great civilizations. As Mrs. Gandhi said more than once, other countries have no lessons to teach us. Karachi was in those days, uniquely

Library of Congress

in Pakistan as well, a very cosmopolitan area. The majority was Muhaji, as I said, lower class, what have you, but the upper class Muhajirs were socially very much on the scene. And then you had Bohras and other commercially-minded Muslim groups, there were several very, very sophisticated Parsi families, and there was a sufficient number of Catholics. Our local Archbishop was also a Cardinal. So there was certainly a level of sophistication and knowledge of the outside world, which wasn't there in much of the rest of Pakistan or in most of India.

Q: How did you find social relations there?

MCKEE: Oh, very easy. Really, very easy. This was still, remember, within a generation of the British having been there. Women were quite willing to appear in public unveiled. I was quite struck in fact that the Sindh Club continued to serve lunch throughout Ramadan, which they would not do now, and haven't done for many years. In those days, no one seemed to find anything at all odd about that. There was a great deal of reverence for Jinnah, in part because he was the father of the country, but in part because he was seen as a man who, while a devout Muslim, did not allow its precepts to control his life. He was never seen as somebody who was trying to force Islam down anybody else's throat.

Q: How about the military there, was this, we had contact with the military in there?

MCKEE: You have to remember always that the military is overwhelmingly Punjabi. I found at the time there were almost, there were essentially no Baluch and no Sindhis in the Pakistan Army and very, very few Muhajirs. Musharraf, who's in power now, is of course a Muhajir, but quite the exception that proves the rule. So in Karachi basically no contact with the military.

Q: What about relations with sort of the Persian Gulf and all that, was this a place where Pakistanis were seeing opportunities to get out and do business?

Library of Congress

MCKEE: Gordon Tiger, bless his heart, when he came to DACOR Bacon House for the Spring Reception mentioned that I had done a very impressive piece of analytical reporting when I was there. Ah, but that was on the educational system. The report I thought he was going to talk about was a piece I did on migration of labor, because '74 to '76 was the period when the really big oil money began to flow into the Gulf - Dubai and Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, what have you. And all of a sudden it was hard to find a good air-conditioning repairman, it was harder to find a good auto mechanic, hard to find a lot of skilled laborers you sort of depended on. They had gone to the Gulf. So I went to the State Labor Office and talked to them, and I talked to some labor contractors and whatever, and I put together a piece of which I'm still rather proud. There was both the economics and the sociology of it. I calculated that certainly at least one Pakistani in ten was directly dependent on remittances from a relative in the Gulf for sustaining daily life. I tried to get into some of the sociology of the migration phenomenon, because, especially the skilled laborers, then were essentially lower-middle class people - in any society, often socially, the most conservative. And yet here the breadwinner, the male breadwinner was gone. And so the woman, the head of the household, but one who traditionally never ventured beyond that household, suddenly had to do so - not only go to the market and buy the food, but also to put the kids in school, and she had just all kinds of contact with the outside world that hadn't been there before. And yet when the husband came back he wanted everything to be as it had been before. There were an awful lot of social strains involved in this. So anyway I was proud of it, part of my portfolio in Karachi in addition to the provincial politics in the southern half of Pakistan was that I was a labor reporting officer for all of Pakistan. So I got to fool around with that stuff.

Q: Did we get any, did you get any look at the educational system?

MCKEE: Well I did. The piece that Gordon so gently, kindly remembered after all these years was a piece I did about education. Essentially I wrote that the nationalization of education which had taken place under Bhutto had had the effect of destroying the

Library of Congress

private schools - the only halfway decent schools in Pakistan anyway, and so everything was going to hell in a bucket. It seemed to me that religious schools were taking up the slack left by the failure of the public schools. Gordon very kindly called that an impressive report.

Q: Why were the schools falling apart?

MCKEE: Lack of revenue, essentially - exploding population and stagnant revenue.

Q: Was there a large underclass in Karachi, I mean I think of T.V. images of these beached ships that were brought up on shore, and taking them apart for their steel.

MCKEE: Ship breaking was an important industry. And it was done by people with their bare hands. There was a beach outside of Karachi, technically in fact in Baluchistan, where these old ships would be pulled up and then people would swarm aboard them and take them apart. Certainly there were a lot of poor people in Karachi. Karachi was a tremendous magnet. For example, the docks were almost controlled by people from the Northwest Frontier Province. They pushed, they pushed the others out. Politics was intensely ethnic and linguistic, as well as religious.

Q: Iranians, were they...?

MCKEE: In evidence? Yes, and there is a rather ironic story in some ways. In the inter-war period, 1920-1940, Karachi had been relatively prosperous, and so you had lots of Persian carpets there, made by Persians who at that point were poor. By the mid-'70s Persians had become rich. Persians came back to Karachi to buy back semi-antique carpets which had in fact originated in Persia. One saw them around.

Q: As far as being Muslim, how about the Sunni-Shia split? How did this play out in Pakistan?

Library of Congress

MCKEE: Well, it played out, but not so much in Karachi. Nobody knows how many Shia there are, it's somewhere between fifteen and twenty-five percent of Pakistan's population. There certainly were sectarian disturbances in Karachi. There were Shia neighborhoods and also, up the river, a place called Khairpur. Khairpur was one of the few princely states to survive in British Sindh, and its nawab had been a Shia Muslim, so it was a sort of a focal point for Shias. Sectarian tensions came to the fore always during Moharram. There's a point at which the Shia, to mourn the death of Imam Hussein at Karbala, take these tazias, these huge papier mache mockups of Hussein's tomb at Karbala, in Iraq, and march them through the streets. Now as they marched them through the streets, they did two things really. One of them is that they flagellate themselves, "ya Hussein, ya Hassan, ya Ali, ya Hussein, ya Hassan, ya Ali," and they put knives through their cheeks and bleed all over the place. They also curse the first four Caliphs, the Sunni Caliphs, Omar and Abu Bakr and the other two. And this of course for Sunni Muslims is just intolerable, so the Pakistani authorities had to put a policeman practically every two feet apart all the way of the march from the Imam Bara to, down to the river, where these things were then dunked into the river, seen no more. But always, certainly everyone feared great sectarian outbursts on occasion.

Q: Did you feel under any threat at all while you were there?

MCKEE: No. Really none. There were a few bandits up in the hills, but even, when you traveled into rural Sindh, but even there I didn't, I never felt under threat. Anytime of the day or night in Karachi I didn't feel under threat.

Q: How about Peace Corps and AID?

MCKEE: Gone, gone, gone.

Q: They'd gone?

Library of Congress

MCKEE: Bhutto threw out the Peace Corps. He had thrown the Peace Corps out much earlier in fact, I think when he was Foreign Minister under Ayub Khan. And AID mission, the extent of it, it was up in Islamabad, almost nothing in Karachi.

Q: Why was Bhutto taking that stand, as we saw it?

MCKEE: He threw out the Peace Corps when he was Foreign Minister. He was trying to build up his leftist image to draw distinction between him and Ayub Khan. Ayub was seen as very much on the right and close to the Americans, so the only place that Bhutto could go really to build up popular support and build up an image was to go to the left, and pose as the champion of the poor. It wasn't called the Pakistan People's Party for nothing.

Q: I take it Bhutto was seen by your and your colleagues at the consulate maybe up in Islamabad as being an opportunistic leader as opposed to one of very strong beliefs.

MCKEE: I think that's fair. Certainly what I reported from Karachi was what I saw as this steady shift from the left to the right by Prime Minister Bhutto. You know it's hard to conceive now, but when he first came to power his was a really pretty good intellect. He was educated in London, educated at the University of Southern California. A guy who had somehow seen a way to bring out the poor masses. He wanted things like barefoot doctors who basically knew only about three or four things, but those were the three or four diseases from which eighty percent of the people suffered. There was a guy named Kamal Asfar who wrote a whole book, it's basically sort of a Communist Chinese inspiration for providing health care and education to the poor of Pakistan. One of his great ideas was to liberate women from the drudgery of making chapattis every day. Men demanded that the chapattis be made hot and on the spot and all, very labor intensive. So he set up these chapatti bakeries that were gonna turn out this pukka pakai roti, which was, you know, already made-up bread. It was a big failure, but the thinking behind it was interesting. Over time, I don't know, it's funny, the occasional conversation that really sticks with you. I got to know a bookseller in the bazaar in Karachi. I got him to the house one time, he

Library of Congress

drank only tea, and was very nervous. He had been a very strong supporter of Bhutto in the beginning, in the '60s under Ayub and then later, and was very much on the left, and therefore was very nervous about being in this big house with this American diplomat. He said to me, 'My friend, we have all been frozen out now. We once had a role to play in the party and it's gone.' The one or two politicians who had been close to Bhutto in his early leftist phase were beaten up, physically. Pakistan in many ways is not a subtle country at all. I mean they were physically beaten by these Federal Security Force people. And I knew one of the ones that had been beaten. You know these conversations leave an impact on you.

Q: Oh God, yes. Well, how about relations between our consulate general in Karachi and the Embassy in Islamabad. Sometimes these are not the greatest, and other times they are.

MCKEE: Well, it was a very useful experience to be the political officer in Karachi, because the political counselor in Islamabad was Howie Schaffer, whom I had known already for some years. And my consul general thought that I was his political officer, and Howie Schaffer thought that I was his political officer. I remember once Howie came down, and we took the long drive up through the Bolan Pass, two day trip to Quetta, to do some provincial reporting. I took advantage of that long time in the carry-all to try to point out to Howie, you know, "Look, Howie, I'm here to report on whatever you want reported on or analyze whatever you want analyzed, but you really need to get on the horn with my boss and chat him up, and construct it in such a way that he agrees that it would be a good idea if Richard were to focus on X for awhile. If you call me up and tell me to do something, you put me immediately in a bind." Howie took the advice very well. I remember we're sitting at one point beside a canal in Quetta and chatting. He did that, and things worked fine thereafter.

Q: So you left there in what, '76?

Library of Congress

MCKEE: That's right.

Q: Whither?

MCKEE: I went out to Washington. I put in a year, a fairly unhappy year, I'm just not a good bureaucrat - as a Desk Officer, Senior Desk Officer for Pakistan. I was also working with a wacky guy that didn't make life any better. My Officer Director was a bit of a nutcase.

Q: This was in AID?

MCKEE: State.

Q: State.

MCKEE: Yes, State. And NEA PAB, and I was really not happy. I had always wanted to study Arabic, and when the chance came to do it I leaped at it. I got out of there after a year and did a year's worth of Arabic in Washington and then a year's worth in Tunisia.

Q: During this time you were in the Desk, did you feel that you just weren't a Desk Officer type, or was it the personnel, the people, or issues or something that made you uncomfortable? MCKEE: One of the problems was simply information retrieval. When you're a desk officer, you don't ask the questions, you're the one who has to answer them. You get these requests for various kinds of information. The office wasn't very well organized. So information retrieval, in a pre-computer age, was often quite time consuming and quite frustrating. Anyway, I certainly knew I was looking for a way out. In a funny way, as had been the case earlier in getting out of Latin America, studying a hard language was the way out.

Q: During the year you were on the Pakistan desk, did you catch tension between the Indian desk? Was that going on?

Library of Congress

MCKEE: U. S. relations with both countries were pretty low, so the really sharp divisions that had been there earlier I think were a lot less sharp. Now what was fascinating was that Bhutto was going down the tubes during that year, and the question was really, what would we do about it? How would we handle that?

Q: Were we, did we feel particularly committed towards Bhutto?

MCKEE: I think not. He was more or less democratically elected, that was obviously a plus. Our relations with India were very bad. That was during the period of Indira's emergency, so the Indians couldn't play their trump card as the world's largest democracy. But I don't think we felt any tremendous commitment to Bhutto, no.

Q: Was Benazir and his daughter at all a figure at that time? Did you ever meet her?

MCKEE: I met her first at Simla, in 1972, when Bhutto took her along for the negotiations with Mrs. Gandhi that resolved the issues remaining from the 1971 war. But she had not yet emerged into her own, into the limelight at that point.

Q: Did, while you were on the desk, were there any within congress or other places, partisans of one side of the Indian or the Pakistani, I mean were they, had...

MCKEE: Yes, yes, I don't remember the details now. A few Democrats liked Pakistan, certainly Steve Solarz was a great fan of I think both Bhutto, and later certainly Benazir. Republicans tended to see Pakistan in a more favorable light, because it was anti-communist and anti-Soviet.

Q: Well, India was trying to get a hold of us, wasn't it?

MCKEE: Sure, sure. It was a big economy, but yet not a great big market for U.S. trade or investment, and the rhetoric into the late '70s was still essentially state socialism, not free market.

Library of Congress

Q: Well also too there seems to be a perennial problem that Americans and Indians tend to preach at each other.

MCKEE: Absolutely.

Q: Not particularly...

MCKEE: To listen to each other.

Q: In many ways almost too alike.

MCKEE: But one of the reasons I do think that the Pakistanis were popular was that they didn't preach at Americans. In fact, indeed they often could play the role of courtier very effectively. There's this marvelous story of Nixon, when he was out of power, flying around the world. In India nobody came to the airport to greet him, and it was just crap. His plane landed in Lahore. Field Marshall Ayub Khan was there at the end of the red carpet, and put him up in exactly the same house that he put him up when he had been vice president some years earlier. These things have a psychological and political impact.

Q: Oh, yes. Well, there's Henry Kissinger. You hear these stories about how Henry Kissinger would land in New Delhi on one of his round-the-world flights or something, and he and Indira Gandhi would sort of... They wouldn't even talk to each other. They'd just sort of sit there for awhile. It was sort of like going for a root canal treatment or something.

MCKEE: Well, there's a new, and it seems to me a very good biography called "Indira," by a woman named Katherine Frank. I'm just maybe a hundred-fifty pages into it, but she's clearly done her homework, and she brings up, in the parts I've read so far, what a very difficult and distracted and interrupted childhood Indira had. She has already hinted at Indira's use of silence to intimidate people - she simply wouldn't respond. And certainly for journalists who interviewed Indira, it drove them nuts. She wouldn't open up.

Library of Congress

Q: That's interesting how these things can have quite an impact. Well in Arabic, was anybody saying 'hey, we invested in your Urdu and all and your Hindi' or was that considered already paid off?

MCKEE: Hey, come on! Seven years in the Subcontinent. I had paid my debt to society.

Q: How did you find, you were taking Arabic from when to when, '76?

MCKEE: '77 to '78 at FSI, and then '78 to '79 in Tunis.

Q: How did you find it?

MCKEE: Oh, it's a bitch. Now I, because I had had Urdu I had some familiarity with the script, but it's an extremely difficult language. There's a piece in the Post this morning.

Q: Yes, I saw that.

MCKEE: And you know, cognates are almost nil. In the written script, long vowels are indicated but short vowels are not. You basically have to know what they are before you read the piece. And some of the sounds are quite different. It's a language that takes a lot of time to learn.

Q: How old were you when you did this?

MCKEE: Well, let's see, '76, I was thirty-five.

Q: Gets harder.

MCKEE: It does indeed.

Q: Were you one of the first to go to school in Tunis?

Library of Congress

MCKEE: Pretty much, because the FSI school had been moved from Beirut when, in '73 or something like that? So yes, we were in the old Italian cultural center downtown.

Q: Is Tunisia a good place to do this?

MCKEE: Among Arabists there was this huge argument about the relocation of the school. Ambassador Herman Eilts did not want the school in Cairo, because our relations with Egypt were just getting re-established, and the Egyptians' big complaint against the Russians in Cairo had been that there had been too damn many of them. He was aware of that. There were also all kinds of questions as to what is the best accent. A lot of people think that the East Bank Palestinian is one of the clearest and best, but anyway, yes, there was an argument. Certainly what we learned in Tunis was not Tunisian Arabic. It was what I called radio Arabic or semi-classical Arabic, it was a sort of a denatured generic kind of Arabic. The native Tunisian Arabic is pretty hard to understand. And in fact at one point FSI taught Maghrebi Arabic as a distinct dialect.

Q: They were teaching that...

MCKEE: In Tangier.

Q: In Tangiers, yes. Where'd you take your trip, or could you still take a trip in those days?

MCKEE: Ah, I didn't know, or didn't take a trip. Now why didn't I take a trip? Maybe, I think family concerns and money concerns. You're right, there was a trip that one could have taken, but I remember very distinctly that I did not take a trip.

Q: How big a group was taking it with you?

MCKEE: I don't know, counting military guys and whatever I suppose it must have been about twenty or something.

Library of Congress

Q: Did you get any feeling, was there sort of an attitude towards Israel at that time, or not?

MCKEE: From the Tunisians?Q: No, from within the group that was going, taking Arabic.

MCKEE: That's a tough question. I'm not in "The Arabists," that famous book. I think, almost willy-nilly, when you make the emotional investment and the temporal investment involved in studying a hard language, you develop some sympathy with the people for whom it's their native language. Yes, I think even then there was a feeling that somehow the Israelis exercised undue influence over United States policy to the detriment of good relations with the Arab states.

Q: I wonder how they could have that impression. I'm laughing.

MCKEE: I'm gonna review this book by Bernard Lewis, I've gotta buckle down and do it. "What Went Wrong," which is a brilliant treatise on exactly that. The subtitle is "Western Impact and Middle East Response." He didn't get into Israel until the conclusion. He really is a very comprehensive historian. I strongly think that, fighting terrorism is a very important thing to do. But you also have to look at the root causes, and the fact of the matter is very few people are willing to do that. Doing so leads directly to questioning the policies that we have followed. Not that Clinton was much better in foreign policy, but, President Bush has just, may have taken a huge step towards destroying the international trade system by agreeing to huge tariffs on steel, just to pick up a couple of electoral votes in Ohio and West Virginia and Pennsylvania. And you know, Bush's indulgence of Israel is in no-one's long-term interests, this is not in the long term interests of the United States, not in the long term interests of the peace of the region, and it is not in the long-term interests of Israel.

Q: I think one of the most disturbing things is how, if the United States is trying to play a role in the Middle East, it should try to play a positive role rather than one which is tied to American electoral votes, which is how it is today. And it has been that way for a long,

Library of Congress

long time. MCKEE: This is also true of our policy toward Cuba. Whatever vestiges of impartiality remain, we already lost our standing as some kind of a mediator between the Arabs and the Israelis. The Arab do not see us as coming into the court with anything like clean hands. There are certainly some very ugly anti-Semites crawling out from under the rock now, seeing their opportunity, but I really believe that the course on which Israel has embarked will lead to the destruction of Israel.

Q: I feel that the associated Jewish influence on American body politics regarding Israel in the long run will help destroy Israel, because it's given this feeling of immunity, and so it can almost disregard the rest of the world because the United States has supposed, and it's a road to disaster.

MCKEE: It is, it's a road to nowhere. Tony Judt wrote a very good piece in the "New York review of books" about a month ago. He called it "the Road to Nowhere." And he started out by focusing on Raymond Aron and the question of Algeria in the early '60s. Aron said, "Look, we cannot kill all the Algerians, and so we have to leave." And that's really what faces the Israelis on the West Bank and in Gaza. I mean, how long will it be before the Israeli Arabs, who are what, twenty percent of the population? How long before they, themselves, start engaging in suicide tactics? Anyway, so yes, to answer your question, there certainly was some, I think, deep concern about Israel's course. That would be the nice way to put it.

Q: Well also at that time it was more or less the career pattern that you were not going to serve in Israel. Was that sort of,

MCKEE: Yes, yes.

Q: It made a difference rather than, as we try today to mix it up more.

MCKEE: Well, one of the students, and a close friend of mine to this day is Ed Abington. He had served in Israel, and then was taking Arabic. There were others, Ed Djerejian, for

Library of Congress

example, who were trying to see both sides of the equation and try to work it through. Dick Murphy of course was the avatar of this kind of sentiment. The elitist Arabist was going out of favor at that time. There's also one other thing - the fact that Arabic is not only a very difficult language but the fact is that the quality of intellectual discourse in the Arab world is wretched. The great line about learning Arabic is that it's the golden key that unlocks the door to an empty room. And there's a lot of truth to that. I can understand the extreme irritation and frustration - I can't really - but I at least empathize with it. Not only these Palestinian kids who have known nothing but refugee their whole lives, their parents have, but also middle-class Arabs. They look around, and they look at these Arab governments, middle-class Arabs look around and say 'My God! How did we get stuck with this?' And to some extent of course they say well, "it's because the Americans support this wretched king who's oppressing us."

Q: Well also, a part of the people who are going, a third generation taking Arabic, it was considered a good career move to learn a hard language, but it meant that you had a whole series of capitals in which you would serve.

MCKEE: Yes, I thought it was very much so. Why the hell take Burmese for Christ's sake, Bulgarian, where would you go with that? Arabic is spoken in twenty-odd capitals. In NEA as State, South Asia had always been sort of this funny kind of suburb which eventually, you know got municipal status on its own. If you were going to stay in NEA, you really had to have Arabic, or you weren't really fully a member of the club. I think that was quite clear.

Q: Well I think, you know, something that I'm not sure has picked up by some people looking at this that, to be an Arabist, essentially careerist, I mean this was a good career move, early Arabists were the sons of missionaries who had served in Syria or some other place like that, but I mean there were sort of hard-headed people said 'Hell, I want to go here, not because they want the Arabs and hated the Jews or anything like that, it was just, as you say, you learn the hard language, you become a member of an organization

Library of Congress

which has got twenty places, and also, it was a sort of chance to be an Ambassador or a DCM.

MCKEE: At least in Mauritania or some place like that.

Q: Or something like that as opposed to, you know, if you learn French or German, NATO affairs, you're never going to be an Ambassador, because those are political appointments.

MCKEE: Well if you had French you could then end up as Ambassador to Ouagadougou or Lome or something.

Q: You'd have to make that jump down there.

MCKEE: And if you took German, yes, your chance of getting in any embassy was about zero. Well yes, that was very definitely true.

Q: Well, I think this is probably a good place to quit for today. Where did you go after this? I like to put it at the end here. We're talking about 19...

MCKEE: Well after the year in Tunis I got in a beat-up old Mercedes that I owned and I drove across Algeria for about a week. I went to Rabat where I then spent two fairly unhappy years. I loved Morocco, but the embassy was an unhappy place. I had a big fight with the counselor for administration. I really wanted to get the hell out of there.

Q: Okay, well we'll talk about that next time, that would be '76 to '78? Great.
MCKEE: (Note) I left Morocco in 1981 for Jeddah. I served there for a year as political officer. Then Ambassador Murphy sent me to Riyadh, where I served for two years as "poloff" and two as political counselor.

Library of Congress

Q: We are not sure what happened, but we're not sure where we left off. So we're going to start with Geneva. Today is the 23rd of September, 2002. When did you go to Geneva?

MCKEE: I went to Geneva in the summer of '86...

Q: And you were there from '86 to when?

MCKEE: '86 to '88. Originally scheduled for three years, curtailed to two, because money was tight and I realized it was probably impossible for me to get promoted into the Senior Service with a political counselor / human rights officer job in Geneva.

Q: So what was your job?

MCKEE: It's an interesting story, it's a good Foreign Service story. The then Permanent Representative was a political guy, a friend of President Reagan's. He thought, in true businessman fashion maybe, that he could run the place without a DCM, a political counselor, or a human rights officer. He was prevailed upon eventually to accept a DCM; he had fired the previous one, and to combine the political counselor and human rights job into one. And I got that position. So I supervised three people, one of whom did only WHO, a civil servant, one of whom did only ILO, Foreign Service Officer, and one of whom did several things, economic commission for Europe and IPU groups of that nature. And then I did the human rights stuff myself. I also was the Mission liaison with the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Q: Well now, there are a number of organizations in Geneva, what was the title of yours?

MCKEE: Well it was political counselor.

Q: But was this, of the titles, what was it?

MCKEE: Oh, it was a whole range of them, World Health Organization was there, International Labor Organization, the International Telecommunications Union.

Library of Congress

Q: Well was it the American mission to...

MCKEE: Oh, I'm sorry, yes, it's the United States Mission to the United Nations Organizations Headquartered in Geneva or some such thing. U.S. Mission.

Q: Who was your political appointee... I mean, your Ambassador?

MCKEE: I was just trying to think of his name... Gerry Carmen was his name.

Q: What was his background?

MCKEE: He was a used car or used tire dealer, I was never sure, from New Hampshire. In the 1980 Republican primary, there was a famous scene in which Ronald Reagan commandeered the microphone in a panel discussion with other candidates for the Republican nomination, saying, 'I paid for that microphone'. Well the story was, was in fact, Gerry Carmen had paid for that microphone.

Q: So, I mean, what was the Mission's mission? What were you doing?

MCKEE: Well it's sort of a diverse mission, in the sense that most of the organizations in Geneva were technical organizations. ILO, ITU, what have you. But various groups wanted to politicize them, and State did not want to seem them politicized, and so, in a way I suppose you could say I was the anti-political counselor, I was the one who was trying to get them to focus on what the U.S. Government thought was the business at hand and not an extraneous agenda that involved political grievances and various human rights things.

Q: How did you find operating in that particular environment?

MCKEE: Well, I was very lucky, because Gerry Carmen quite about six weeks after I got there, and his successor was a very nice guy, Joe Petrone, whose wife Augusta was also a very nice person. Two very good DCMs, Ron Flack my first year and Bill

Library of Congress

Marsh my second year, so the Mission itself ran fairly smoothly after Gerry left. I've gotta confess, I was not particularly attracted to UN work, it's heavily, heavily influenced by precedent, every resolution and every meeting, practically every resolution builds on the preceding resolution. And every adverb and every semi-colon is argued about. Also, the UN organizations ran on the same regional basis on which the UN political side in New York ran - the African group, the Western European and Others Group, in those days, essentially the Soviet Group, the Latino group and all of that. This left Israel out in the cold. More to the point, in that setting there were an awful lot of awfully boring planning meetings of the group before you sat in on a very boring plenary of ITU or ILO or whatever it was.

Q: Well it was sort of, the same battles fought again and again and again?

MCKEE: Absolutely, absolutely. The same resolutions would be brought up year after year and debated year after year, and slightly modified to reflect changing political alliances and conditions, and then voted on. It was, frankly, very hard to see the relevance of all of it. Now having said that, I did enjoy the Human Rights Commission and the Human Rights Committee, which is an experts group. I did come to see that they couldn't function without the NGOs. NGOs are very important in the international human rights arena, as they are for example in the international environmental arena.

Q: Particularly when the Reagan administration came in, it was, if it didn't run on an anti-UN platform, it certainly, the United Nations was not its favorite organization. Was this reflected in what you all were doing?

MCKEE: Well, I think so, I think so. And that's actually one of the reasons I curtailed, because I just couldn't see that the Reagan administration had any real use for the UN. The great example of it is, for my money, the appointment of Armando Valadares as our representative to the UN Human Rights Commission in 1988. He was Cuban, who after twenty-odd years in Castro's jails was freed and went to live in Spain. He was a bit of a

Library of Congress

hero for right-wing Cubans in Florida and elsewhere. He came out in '87 as an advisor to the U. S. delegation. Then, as I think is often the case, he was named to lead it. The fact is that he got his citizenship through some special legislation, only weeks, or at the most, months before the Commission convened in the spring of 1988. He spoke rapid-fire Cuban Spanish, and actually pretty good French, but almost no English. The point here was that the only use that the Reagan administration had for the UN system was to try to politicize it, and make it serve these objectives. In this case, the goal was to get a human rights resolution targeting Cuba, which we did. That's the reason I have that Superior Honor Award on the wall. The Reagan administration was not interested in the programmatic aspects of the Human Rights Commission, the special rapporteurs on torture, on non-judicial killing, that kind of thing. And they were not interested very much in the ILO, for example. So it was in a lot of ways not a very happy environment.

Q: Well how did you find dealing with your counterparts on these various commissions? Were they more or less creatures in the UN, had they acclimated themselves or it, or did you find otherwise?

MCKEE: Well I think in the Western European and Others Group, there were thoughtful people with a lot of experience in multilateral diplomacy who did really feel that the organization had something to contribute to making the world better. I would argue that their situation was a little bit easier, in that they almost all represented parliamentary democracies, whereas of course in our system, you have to keep track of what the Executive wants, you have to keep an eye on what Congress wants, and it's a much more diffuse kind of government. The representatives of the other countries in most cases were either political appointees or sort of careerists run rampant, not a very inspiring crowd.

Q: Well you mentioned you got a Superior Honor Award, what did you do to sort of merit this?

Library of Congress

MCKEE: Mollify the members of the Western European and Others Group by, first of all, persuading the Department and then Mr. Valadares to come two weeks earlier, earlier than usually had been the case. I took him around to call on heads of missions there, key missions there, so that they could see that he wasn't a Johnny one-note. He actually was, and this was true, he was also interested in other human rights issues such as Chile and South Africa, which were hot at that time. But also just basically I made an effort to develop a rapport between him and these other missions so that we could achieve our objective, which was this resolution about Cuba. To that end, I mean the White House moved mountains, President Reagan would call presidents of other countries to get them to vote in favor of our resolution, or at least to abstain.

Q: Did the Soviets play any particular role in what you were seeing there at the time?

MCKEE: They were not active in retrospect in the human rights commission or in the ILO or the other organizations, WHO, ITU. The country was actually beginning to fall apart a little bit. The most significant, I think, conversation I ever had in the Foreign Service was that my Russian opposite number. One of my duties was also to keep an eye on regional political issues. For example, while I was there, there were proximity talks between the Afghanistan resistance and the Soviets about the Soviets' leaving Afghanistan. And Cambodia was another regional issue, I got to know, my Soviet opposite number a bit. He called me once and asked me to come by for coffee in the Delegates' Lounge. It turned out that he was really quite distraught. He had come from a family of old Bolsheviks. His father had been a railroad engineer, what more Stalinoid occupation could there have been? He was brought up believing all this stuff. Of course the revelations of the '50s had some adverse impact. But what really hit him was his brother is coming back from serving the military in Afghanistan as a drug addict. He was just really concerned that the Soviet Union was falling apart. He made the point that, what are now the Turkic Republics in Central Asia, were all run by these family rival mafias that the USSR authorities were afraid to

Library of Congress

confront. But anyway, overall the answer to your question, I don't remember the Soviets being particularly active in these fora.

Q: How about the Arab bloc? Particularly vis a vis Israel. I mean I imagine this, did this take up quite a bit of your time?

MCKEE: Oh, absolutely, this was one of the biggest thing that the political counselor did. A whole bunch of pro-Arab resolutions would be introduced into every forum, including when the ICRC had one of its once-every-five-year meetings.

Q: The Red Cross.

MCKEE: Yes, the Red Cross, yes. While I was there, in every forum the Arab group would introduce resolutions. If it was in the ILO, it would be the Israeli suppression of Palestinian trade unions; in the WHO, it would be Israeli health practices that threaten the health of Palestinian children. And, mind you, there was a lot of sentiment among the representatives of the developing countries and also among the Europeans that this was true, that the Israelis did deserve to be censured and criticized. Of course this was not the view in Washington.

Q: What did you have, sort of an anti-Israeli sniffer that you put on everything that came out, or was it...

MCKEE: Well, that's not too far from the mark, although, we're not talking rocket science. These resolutions are published and you know who's sponsoring them and you know what they say.

Q: Were you able to beat them down?

MCKEE: Sometimes, but quite often the resolution would come out and we would either abstain or ours would be the only negative vote.

Library of Congress

Q: Did you have any contact with the Israeli embassy?

MCKEE: The Israeli Mission, yes, I talked to them from time to time. But you know the Israelis' contempt for the UN matches the UN's contempt for Israel.

Q: I take it, for both professional reasons and sort of personal things, I mean you didn't care for this multilateral, multinational, what is it, multi...

MCKEE: Multilateral.

Q: Multilateral diplomacy. Which is a creature of its own.

MCKEE: Well it's very different from bilateral diplomacy. It combines the worse aspects of a grade school classroom and an insane asylum. Others find it challenging and rewarding, but I didn't. So an opportunity came up to go back to Pakistan, to the Consulate General in Lahore, and so I put in for it. Thanks to a couple patrons, Arnie Raphel, may he rest in peace, and Ed Abington, particularly, Bob Peck, may he rest in peace. I was assigned as Consul General in Lahore in 1988.

Q: And you were there in Lahore from when to when?

MCKEE: Three years, '88 to '91.

Q: What was the situation in Pakistan and then Lahore in '88?

MCKEE: Well, first of all, we kept the Consulate in Lahore open primarily because it's really the political capital of the country. The legal capital is Islamabad and the economic capital is Karachi. The real political capital is Lahore, because the Punjab, of which Lahore is the capital, is the biggest province, about fifty percent of the people and about eighty percent of the army personnel. We also did visas of course, and "visa" is a four- letter word. Anyone who's dealt with them for any length of time knows what a frustrating, irritating factor, visas can be. The situation in the country politically and internationally, was

Library of Congress

that our relations were not really very good, the Pressler Amendment had come in, and there wasn't much aid to Pakistan.

Q: What was the...

MCKEE: Because of the Pakistanis' efforts to achieve a nuclear weapons capability, the aid was cut off. So relations really weren't good. There was sort of an effort to keep military aid going for awhile. The Congress got wise and cut that off, too. Pakistan is a country with a permanent sense of grievance and vulnerability. While China was more important to them than we were, we were always pretty important to them as well. And a lot of Pakistanis genuinely like Americans. One of the differences between my tour in Karachi, in '74 to '76 and my later tour in Lahore from '88 to '91 was that by the time of the second tour there was this large group of Pakistani professionals living and working in the States, particularly doctors and vets. That made a real difference in the bilateral relationship. In the country, the situation was that Benazir Bhutto, whom I could really never stand, was Prime Minister. Her major opponent, Mian Nawaz Sharif, was a rascal, but a lovable rascal. He was the chief minister of my province, of the Punjab, and so therefore I had to be very careful in my dealings with the provincial government. If the federal government complained to the Ambassador, and the Ambassador, was Bob Oakley, he would come down on me.

Q: I've heard Benazir Bhutto has had sort of this, sort of a star boding in the American media and all that, but people who vote with her, in the government at that time don't give her the same quality, what were, how did you see her?

MCKEE: A very complex person. She had two brothers, both dead now, but her father chose her, not one of them, to inherit the political mantle. I saw that for the first time that Simla in the hills of India in 1972, when Mrs. Gandhi and Bhutto negotiated the end of the Bangladesh war. It was clear the Bhutto had brought her along to take away some of the limelight from Indira, and she did so. At that point she was twenty years old, very attractive

Library of Congress

undergraduate at Cambridge. But I just thought that she was, this tremendous elitist, really quite arrogant in a lot of ways, as were the people around her, whereas Nawaz Sharif came essentially from a Kashmiri background from an industrialist family, and was much rougher around the edges. In fact, I thought he was much more in touch with the average Pakistani. That said, he was initially a creation of the intelligence service and the military. He only later acquired political popularity of his own.

Q: Well now, where did the Punjab sit in the Pakistan equation?

MCKEE: All the Punjab, except economically perhaps, even there, really dominated the whole country. I mean it was fifty - sixty percent of the population, it was eighty percent of the Army, its landowner class was the dominant political class, the Punjabis really just dominated, they dominated the civil bureaucracy. The only competition they had once had was from the Muhajirs, immigrants from India who settled in Karachi. By the time of my second tour, the Muhajirs, politically were isolated in their own political party and really did not, didn't have much impact except nuisance value nationally. The only other challenge to the Punjabis was probably from the Pathans in the Northwest Frontier Province who were pretty well represented in the Army. The Sindhi landlords, Mrs. Bhutto being one of them, of course were a political class to be conjured with.

Q: Well now, where was religious fundamentalism at that stage?

MCKEE: It was not very prominent, but it became more prominent after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. There had been several Islamic political parties, and I made an effort to cultivate their leaders in Lahore. Their following was almost entirely middle-class urban people. They had no following in the countryside because the landlords didn't permit them to develop a following in the countryside. So there were occasional flare-ups and there were riots against Christians and there were occasional demonstrations between various sects of Muslims about who was either a better Muslim or not a Muslim at all. But the sentiment only crystallized after Saddam invaded Kuwait, and then there were lots of

Library of Congress

demonstrations. Now the irony here was that Saddam had been, up until that point, a secularist. He became a Muslim only after he invaded Kuwait.

Q: Well how did you find, was Saddam a popular, he invaded Kuwait, did this push him into greater popularity?

MCKEE: The Iraqi Embassy spread a lot of money around into lots of pockets in Saddam's favor. Posters put up on walls and things like that. I think among the lower classes in Pakistan, there was resentment of the United States, and he was able to play on that. One of my favorite people in Pakistan, who was later assassinated, was a man of Kashmiri descent who was the Chief Minister of the Punjab atterman. Nawaz Sharif moved to Islamabad as Prime Minister. He got up and said 'Any Pakistani who endorses the idea that a larger country can invade and occupy a smaller neighboring country should have his head examined.' He was absolutely right, but that didn't count for much with the demonstrators.

Q: Well did, how did you find working there, I mean what was it, were you sort of under-siege or...

MCKEE: No, no. After the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, we slowly had to send people home, so soon we were just a little group of brothers and sisters there at the Consulate. Dependents and all had to be sent home. So we watched lots of videos. We watched the whole series of "The Lonesome Dove" on the VCR. I had a bodyguard, but I never cut down my public appearances. February of '91, I went to, an annual kite-flying festival which was a very big thing in Lahore. I went to one celebration on the roof of one of these hotels. The media were there, and I had a lot of fun. The next day the media made a lot of the fact that despite the tensions between the United States and Iraq, and the threats to the Americans here, here's the Consul General out flying a kite. I was participating in a local, cultural... popular cultural festival.

Library of Congress

Q: Were you and your political officers able to get out and find out what was going on in the country?

MCKEE: Whoo! Traveled all the time, sure, I love to travel, all over the boonies. By car down to Multan, over to Faisalabad. We scheduled regular trips. You know, the usual routine, you let the government know what you're doing, and you work together on setting up appointments, and you go see the Governor and the Chief Minister and the various Ministers, the local newspaper guy and whatever, and chat away.

Q: Did our relations, our relations weren't that great with India at this time either, were they?

MCKEE: No, relations weren't really very good with either country.

Q: Probably one of the times when we were building an equal level. Was, in Pakistan were they following the Gulf War on CNN?

MCKEE: Yes, the answer then has to be yes.

Q: Well the reason I asked this is it became sort of a fascination almost around the world about, granted it was through a vaguely distorted lens, but it looked like a very high-tech war and all that.

MCKEE: One of the most successful things I ever did was sort of by chance. The U.S. Defense Representative, Pakistan, would have been in charge of our military supply and training mission if we had had one. He was up in Islamabad and wanted to come down to Lahore. I thought that was a good idea because Lahore is rife with retired generals, not so much active duty generals, but lots and lots of very impressive, retired generals. So he came down, and I organized a lunch for him. There must have been twenty-five retired colonels and generals there. As it turned out it was on the day, or the day after, General Schwarzkopf's brilliant maneuvers that cut off the Iraqi Army and all that. This American

Library of Congress

brigadier demonstrated his cleverness by being fully prepared with his easel and his maps and his pointers to show exactly what Schwarzkopf had done. I want to tell you, these generals enjoyed the show. In the '65 war with India, there occurred just outside of Lahore the largest scale tank battles between the Second World War and the Israeli-Arab war of '67, so a lot of these guys had a lot of experience with tank maneuvers, and they were just fascinated. It was a lovely luncheon. People talked about it for months afterward.

Q: Were you concerned about all of a sudden a mob appearing to burn down the consulate as happened to our embassy in Islamabad?

MCKEE: Oh, yes, that was a concern. It was interesting. They always targeted the USIS office, which was near the university and separate from the Consulate. It was more accessible to the students and easier to get up a mob there. Of course USIS didn't issue visas. They were a little, I thought it was probably a little bit careful about attacking the Consulate because they might be recognized and not get a visa. Also the area where the Consulate was located was more difficult to access. There was one time I remember when things were very bad, and there were demonstrators going after the Consulate. My servant suggested that I put on the Pakistani national dress, the shalwar kameez, a very flowing, loose kind of thing, and slip out the back door of my residence. And I said 'Look, with my eyes and complexion that's not gonna happen.' So they did in fact run past the house and nothing happened. Now mind you I had at that point maybe a half dozen policemen outside the house, and I made sure that they got tea and cookies on a regular basis.

Q: Did you have any trouble talking to various people in your area?

MCKEE: Not really. I even reached out to the bearded ones, and organized for example one of these interactive television things. I had an excellent female public affairs officer. The bearded ones could talk to Muslim savants in the United States about how Muslims were treated in the United States and all that. These old boys were deeply but narrowly educated, loved the attention and they just sort of bloomed this program was during

Library of Congress

Ramadan, so I invited them all back to the house, sat 'em down on carpets, must have been twenty or twenty-five of them. When the cannon boomed and it was the end of the day's fast, the servants came around with milk and dates, you always break the fast in Pakistan with milk and dates. And then we had a really nice dinner, I thought that was a good thing to do.

Q: What about the Bhutto government, I understand it was quite corrupt, I guess most of them are, but her governments are known for being pretty corrupt. Were we reporting on this or were you feeling constraints in the Embassy saying 'let's not push this too hard.'?

MCKEE: You know, the kind of contracts where corruption might be involved were at the federal level in Islamabad. Sitting in Lahore, I didn't hear about things like that. It was always secondhand, it wasn't really my area of responsibility. One thing that I regret in retrospect is that, a little bit distracted by Mian Nawaz Sharif's roguishness, I didn't report on the extent of his corruption. He and his family were also knee-deep in corruption, as later came out when he was Prime Minister, or after he was Prime Minister.

Q: Did, what sort of staff did you have?

MCKEE: A great staff. And at one point we actually got up to about sixteen or seventeen Americans because we had seabees to help to build the new Consulate General building. The minute we did reach the magic number, which as I recall, also involved a magic number of military people, we were able to get APO. That was probably, in terms of the American staff, my greatest achievement in three years there.

Q: APO was military postal service.

MCKEE: Exactly, and a vast improvement over the diplomatic pouch; for example when ordering stuff from Sears. That number didn't last long, we sank down to ten or twelve or something, more like ten. A consular section of three or four officers, an admin guy who was very good. I depended on him very heavily. A communicator, again, an excellent guy,

Library of Congress

one Branch Public Affairs officer, one political officer, and then a whole pack of Pakistanis. There was one political local employee. There were many in the consular section who were really under immense pressure. There was a corrupt atmosphere surrounding the issuance of visas. It was a great big problem. They were constantly both tempted with bribes and subjected to threats from Pakistanis demanding visas.

Q: Did, was there much political life in the Punjab of the Bhutto government, I mean were you reporting how this, how their rule was working and all?

MCKEE: Oh, yes, yes, certainly we reported on her popularity, on the effectiveness of her political programs. I was in touch with the People's Party, her party leaders in the Punjab, so, yes, that was a regular reporting responsibility.

Q: Contact with the military there?

MCKEE: It was really pretty limited. There were lots of retired generals. Some of them became very close friends. Other than that, the only contact that I really developed, which was a very nice general commanding the fourth corps, General Mahsud. We got to the point where we exchanged social visits. He, of course, never talked about military strategy, which I probably wouldn't have understood anyway, or about the political attitudes of the generals, which I would have understood very well.

Q: Was there any, during this time were you feeling the threat at all from India?

MCKEE: No. The only problem was that India had a nuclear capability, and the Pakistanis seemed hell-bent to develop one. I would often ask 'When you have this, what do you plan to do with it? If you drop it on Delhi or Agra, first off all you'll kill a lot of Muslims, and secondly, if the wind's blowing the wrong direction, it'll all come back and get you anyway.' These arguments didn't make much headway with the Pakistanis.

Q: Were you able to, this nuclear development in your consular district or?

Library of Congress

MCKEE: Not really, it was sort of a federal topic. One item, though, was just beginning to come up when I was there. There are lots and lots of people in Lahore who are of Kashmiri descent, Nawaz Sharif's family, for example. And while I was there, in that period, the Indian government, if memory serves, ousted an elected government in Indian-held Kashmir and instituted a real crackdown involving lots of human rights abuses. For many people that I knew in Lahore, the people that were being abused on the other side of the Line of Control were close relatives, and I got an awful lot of 'Why can't the United States come in and stop?'

Q: You left, were there any major developments during the time you were there other than obviously the Gulf War?

MCKEE: Other than the Gulf War, the only other one I would say would be the election of 1990. I thought Benazir would win, but she lost. We didn't realize the extent to which the Army intelligence people would fix the elections, quite crudely sometimes. The Embassy insisted that we get a Superior Honor Award for our reporting on the campaign and polling, but I always wondered why. We didn't predict the elections right or how they would be held. There is one thing I'm sort of proud of. There is a group of either apostates or unorthodox or heretics or whatever called Ahmadis, who originated, a little over a century ago in India. They were seen by a lot of orthodox Muslims as tools of the British and then as non-Muslims, but they did well in Pakistan, rose up to high positions in the bureaucracy, and to some extent in the military. After some riots in '51 they were declared non-Muslims, so they were sort of a persecuted group. Their headquarters was in Rabwa, which was in my consular district. About two months before I was to leave Pakistan, spring of '91, I went off on a tour, sort of a farewell tour of the Punjab, and I stopped and called on their leader. They were very cordial, they were certainly happy to see me. When I got back to Lahore the fundamentalist press was all over me. How could I talk to them, insulting behavior, how could I talk to the apostates and enemies of Islam and all that was good. I hadn't told Bob Oakley, who was my Ambassador, that I was gonna do it. I didn't tell him. Because I didn't

Library of Congress

want to put him in a difficult position, either telling me I couldn't go, which he wouldn't want to do, or telling me I could go, which would have gotten him into trouble with elements in Pakistan. So when I came back, he was able to say 'Well, you know, I didn't know about this in advance, and Mr. McKee's a Foreign Service Officer, and certainly he's interested in Pakistan, he's got every right to go visit them.' Human rights, I was very interested in human rights, it was the right thing to do.

Q: Were we doing any monitoring on the Islamic schools?

MCKEE: The madrassas.

Q: The madrassas. What was going on there?

MCKEE: Well, I did report on the decline and almost fall of the public education system in Pakistan at the grade school and Jr. High level. In retrospect we did not report much on the activities of the Madrassas, which we could have done, and I think I would have had the access to do so. That said, in my previous posting I did in fact do a long report on public education, including the Madrases, and I was quite surprised the other day that Gordon Tiger, my boss when I was in Karachi and a grand old man, remembered that, reminded me that I had written that report.

Q: Well then, in the Spring of '91, you left.

MCKEE: I got a reassignment to go back to Washington, where I hadn't worked in since 1977, to be the office director for the Arabian Peninsula. It was a position that I wanted. I did it for two years. It was undoubtedly the most difficult position I ever held in the Foreign Service. I'm not a particularly good bureaucrat. I didn't like Washington. I did well enough at it that at the end of it David Mack, my boss and good friend who saved my posterior on many occasions, asked me if I wanted to do it for another year. I said no, I didn't want to do it.

Library of Congress

Q: What does the Arabian Peninsula encompass?

MCKEE: Well, that was one of the problems, in a way, with the desk, it's the Saudis, but it's also, we used to call them Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs if the Saudis were Snow White, then you've got the Seven Dwarfs - Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, UAE, Oman, and then there were two Yemens, only one of which we recognized. So you had out there six American Ambassadors all thinking they were very important people and demanding service from the desk, and then there were also six Arab Ambassadors in Washington. Now Bandar, the Saudi Ambassador, didn't even operate at the State Department level, by the way. He operated at the White House level. But the rest of these guys were fairly small fish. And they often had difficulties seeing Assistant Secretaries or one of the deputies for NEA, so they would come visit me.

Q: Well, wasn't there a carry over of globalism arms, particularly after the Gulf War with Bahrain?

MCKEE: Oh, absolutely. Oh, yes. Relations were very, very good, particularly with Kuwait, but also with the others. Other countries, except Yemen, the two halves of which were united was, soon after I left as office director. Our relations were very good, in that sense it was all very close.

Q: How about Kuwait? What, this is sort of the aftermath of the war. MCKEE: *The flames were still burning when I became Office Director so there was a whole series of efforts literally of putting out the flames. The Kuwaiti Ambassador, Dr. Muhammed, was a nice guy. Skip Gnehm was the Ambassador in Kuwait and he was, it's not the Islamic thing so say, but he was a demigod there. So that relationship was really very good. But that said, you know, we urged the Kuwaitis for example to hold elections and liberalize their treatment of women, because we had to justify our intervention on some basis in addition to defending sovereignty and keeping Saddam from the oil wells.*

Library of Congress

Q: How did that go in your time?

MCKEE: I don't know. The Kuwaitis, as I recall, were members of Parliament, they certainly did hold elections, there were women members of Parliament I think. But they, you know, they said yes and did nothing. Americans, they have a very short attention span, everyone knows.

Q: How about Qatar and the UAE, did they...

MCKEE: Well one of the interesting things I did was to take a trip out to the region with Dick Clarke, who was then the head of the whole pol-mil bureau, who was then looking for places where we could pre-position materiel, but not soldiers, in the event of another crisis in the Gulf. I chuckle now, because we persuaded the Qataris to accept a very austere kind of depot. Now, Qatar has become kind of the spear of our efforts to move into Iraq.

Q: Well, Oman had, was also a place where we had a lot of stuff in there.

MCKEE: Yes, we had base rights that we could use on Masirah Island. The Omanis I really liked, they were really quite different from the other Gulf Arabs. For one thing they had had an empire of their own, including a port on the Baluchi coast of Pakistan and Zanzibar. Also in terms of Islamic strictures, they were different from the others. I liked the Omanis.

Q: Talk about Saudi Arabia, or Yemen, before we get to talk- (end of tape)

I think it was, when the Gulf War started, it was practically the only country around that supported Saddam Hussein. What happened after the war?

MCKEE: Well, the Yemeni economy was in pretty rotten shape because the Saudis had expelled hundreds of thousands of Yemeni workers and wouldn't let them back into the country. Our relations were thin, but not sort of actively antagonistic. One of the key points

Library of Congress

was that there had been since time immemorial a Jewish presence in Yemen, and there were some very, informal is a nice way to put it, arrangements whereby these folks could leave Yemen and end up in Israel. And keeping that conduit open and out of newspapers took some doing.

Q: Saudi Arabia, again, this would be the aftermath of the war. What were our issues with them and all?

MCKEE: Well there were some lingering disputes over who would pay how much for the cost of the war. I didn't get directly involved in those battles, that was mostly in the Pentagon. Other questions were things like maintaining the Patriot missile presence in Saudi Arabia, and, for that matter, Kuwait and Bahrain. Now it's all been largely discredited, but in the immediate wake of the liberation of Kuwait, the Patriot missiles were seen as just crucially important to maintaining the security and independence of the Gulf states. The Gulf states were quite willing to pay for these crews. Reflecting the desire to have a good political relationship, the State Department would endorse their requests that these crews stay on, but the Pentagon was quite opposed. These unaccompanied postings to the Gulf resulted in a lot of refusals to reenlist among these very highly trained technicians, so that was of course a source of tension with the Pentagon.

Q: Were we trusting the Saudis to do something about the role of Yemen and all that?

MCKEE: No. I could elaborate, but the answer is really no.

Q: Really no. Was there any effort on any part within our government or outside forces to do something about this?

MCKEE: Not that I recall. You don't want to know.

Q: Did, was anybody looking again at the religious teachings, because this later became important ten years later. But what was going on in Saudi schools and Saudi society?

Library of Congress

MCKEE: In that period, '91 to '93, by that time there were very few Saudis in American universities. Twenty years earlier there had been as many as twelve thousand. But the Saudis had built up these local universities, some departments staffed by Western expatriates, but most departments staffed by Palestinians and Egyptians and Sudanese and what have you. The curriculum and all was very heavily Islamic, and Islamic precepts even influenced other areas, science for example, English literature, if you were teaching that. We certainly had the sense that these were lousy universities, really, but I don't think we had the sense that they were schools for fundamentalism. I was conscious, that, in the aftermath of the Gulf war, the social situation in Saudi Arabia was, incredibly enough, even more restrictive than it had been when I lived there from '81 to '86. The religious police paid for by the state were much more intrusive than they had been earlier. We, of course, made sure that everybody understood that the basis of the legitimacy of the Saudi princely family was the perception that they were faithful guardians of the two holy shrines. But no, I really don't recall concerns that either the Saudi government, directly or indirectly or individual Saudis were funding what were seen to be fundamentalist groups.

Q: You mention that, you know, after your time there you wanted to get out of the bureaucratic battles, ins and outs didn't suit you, how did this manifest itself?

MCKEE: Well I thought of the endless production of briefing memos. It was often just regurgitating the same information. I found that frankly extremely unsatisfactory. I thought - maybe this is a confession of my own relative ineffectiveness or simple lack of interest - I don't know. But I found that, like when I had been Pakistani desk officer fifteen years earlier, the really sexy issues were taken up by somebody else, one of the functional bureaus or somebody on the sixth floor. The desk officers and the desk were sort of left with the routine, boring stuff, and you know that's not particularly good for morale. It wasn't good for my morale, anyway.

Q: Did, you were there until what, '90...?

Library of Congress

MCKEE: I was there for the two longest years of my life, '91 to '93. And then I was up for reassignment. It's a funny story. I tried for a couple of DCMships and got shot down, so I put in for some counselorships. It got sort of narrowed down to Bogota, which would have meant a return to Colombia, or Ankara. I was sort of leaning toward Bogota. Then I got a call from a dear friend of mine, Anne Woods Patterson, who had been the Economic Counselor in Riyadh, who was then I think Deputy Assistant Secretary for Latin America. She asked me what in the world I was doing, bidding on this job. She said 'It's only narcotics, that's all it is, is narcotics, day and night. Week in and week out.' And so I backed out of that one and pushed hard for the Ankara job, which I got. The Ankara job was one of the best assignments certainly that I had in my career.

Q: Well this is probably a good place to stop. So we'll pick this up next time...

MCKEE: We can do language training in '94, '94, in very short order, and then we can do three years in Ankara, '94 to '97.

Q: All right, good.

Today is the 9th of March, 2003. A propos nothing except the conversation we had was Foreign Service stories, I'm going to let you tell that and then we'll move on.

MCKEE: Well this is a story of Angie, Angier Biddle Duke, who was a marvelous Ambassador in Morocco, as I think I mentioned earlier. He told the story more than once on himself. After World War II, in the late '40s, when Dean Acheson was Secretary of State, we upgraded any number of legations to embassies, including the one in El Salvador. And Angier Biddle Duke, who was then in his late 20s or early 30s, was named Ambassador to El Salvador by the Democrats, by Truman. In his interview with the Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, Acheson asked him, how does it feel to be our first "shambassador" to El Salvador. Angie didn't say how he responded to that really rather

Library of Congress

insulting question. He did have the charm and grace and wit to tell that story himself. So now I think we want to move into the...

Q: Well first place, it was '93, '94 when you came to Turkey.

MCKEE: That's right.

Q: How did that go, how did you find Turkish?

MCKEE: Well, actually, this is the kind of the thing where I break my arm patting myself on the back. After Arabic and Urdu, Turkish wasn't too tough. There's a lot of Turkish in Urdu and there's a lot of Arabic in Turkish, so that wasn't so difficult. And thanks to Ataturk, they use the Western alphabet, the Roman alphabet with a few small changes, so that wasn't so hard. But also Turkish itself is, among the world's major languages, the most regular. Linguists love it, because even the most common - verbs, to have, to go, to do, to be - are regular. The other thing I would say is that we started in out in '93, '94, in the old rented quarters in Rosslyn, which of course were wretched, poor heating, poor ventilation, not designed for language teaching, but in mid-course we moved into the marvelous new FSI campus at Arlington Hall, in Arlington. It was subsequently was dedicated to George Schultz, and absolutely right, because it was George Schultz who kept the construction money in the budget year after year.

Q: And he, this was his, a real consternation is that probably the only Secretary of State we've ever had that really understood the importance of training, except perhaps the present Secretary.

MCKEE: I would include the present secretary, those two, and also of course they're outstanding for two reasons. They both have military backgrounds, and they both carried, as far as I can see, that military concern for subordinates and for management and for organization and for process into their incumbencies as secretaries of state. I applaud diplomatic readiness initiative of Secretary Powell, which aims at strengthening the whole

Library of Congress

training function, recruiting a sufficient number of people that training assignments aren't routinely curtailed, which we all know has been the case forever, especially over the summer in the Foreign Service, and giving credit in terms of promotion to FSO's who do well in the training. This all redounds very much to the credit of Secretary Powell. As you say, you really have to go back to George Schultz to find anyone who began to have that level of passion.

Q: Before that, I think probably, George Marshall wasn't in there long enough, it was just beginning. Now, '94 you went to Ankara, and you were in Ankara from when, until '97?

MCKEE: I was in Ankara from the summer of '94 to the summer of '97. That means in terms of the Embassy the last few months of Dick Barkley's incumbency and then actually all of Marc Grossman's incumbency. It was a marvelous assignment, in the sense that our relations with Turkey are complicated, Turkey itself is a very complicated country, there was an immense amount of variety. With a few exceptions, the Embassy staff was absolutely superb. Certainly such colleagues as Bill Eaton on the admin side, he particularly comes to mind, there was a wonderful working environment overall. Grossman is of course a superb, a very thoughtful guy.

Q: He's presently Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs.

MCKEE: Having served with great distinction after he left Ankara as Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs and Director General of the Foreign Service. Much of the groundwork, as I understand it, for this diplomatic readiness initiative of Secretary Powell's is traceable to the work that Marc did when he was Director General.

Q: From my perspective, he'd taken quite an interest in oral history, and promoting, in fact we're going to be doing something for Under Secretaries of State and Political Affairs, getting a group together. He's one of the few active officers who thinks historically, I think.

Library of Congress

MCKEE: He's also, I must say, if I can put in a plug for DACOR, the organization that's given me employment, an avid reader of our monthly Bulletin. I know this because he sent a message saying that he was very happy that we were working with AFSA on the Elderhostel outreach program. He says that his own parents were avid Elderhostel people, as indeed is my own mother, and that if we ever needed him for an Elderhostel program, all we'd have to do was call. By the way, this is also true of Marc, if we ever need him to speak, he tries to find time for us. He has come to several of the receptions that we give for newly commissioned officers and their families. He is really, as an example of an absolutely superb officer rising to the top as he should.

Q: '94 when you arrived there, what was the status of our relationship with Turkey, and what were, where were the complications?

MCKEE: Well...

Q: Firstly, what was your job?

MCKEE: I was Political Counselor. It is important to know that there was also a Political Military Counselor. The Embassy in Ankara was one of the few that still retained a separate political-military section. And that obviously speaks to the importance of the military relationship, military element in the bilateral relationship. In terms of our relations with Turkey, first of all, the whole period that I was there was a period of essentially unstable coalition governments. No party had a majority in Parliament, and this meant a lot of sort of jerkiness in Turkish policy. It frankly facilitated corruption at various levels. Inflation was steadily eating away at the economy during the entire three years that I was there. Inflation is also, as we all know, a great encourager of corruption. The weakness of the coalitions also provides the military opportunities to meddle in domestic, Turkish domestic politics, which is, for my money, not a good thing. Internally, at that time, Mrs. Ciller was the Prime Minister. She was, in great favor with the Americans, because she was young and female and quite attractive and very articulate in English. She had spent

Library of Congress

a year in the United States. She also proved to be a notably corrupt, for my money, Prime Minister, and one who even by Turkey's low standards for civilian politicians, was quick to change the coloration of her policies to suit the changing political climate. Her partner, Mesut Yilmaz, was frankly no better. It was a time when human rights were a major concern in the bilateral relationship. Restrictions on freedom of speech, particularly, and the subject of torture, we worked very hard on that one. It was also a time when the Islamist political forces were on the rise. They had won the municipal elections of early 1994, including the mayoral offices in such big cities as Ankara and Istanbul. And indeed, in the Christmas elections of 1995, they, just by a nose, came in as the largest single party in Parliament. This meant that the Embassy, which was very close to the secular elite in Turkey, had to scramble a bit to reach out and make contact with these Islamist forces. This was not easy. They had been ignored before and they were, many of them, very narrowly educated and suspicious of the United States. But actually, in a way, and again I don't want to break my arm patting myself on the back, I think it was fortuitous that I had come from postings to several Muslim countries where I had been involved in reporting on and analyzing domestic politics. I could bring a certain familiarity and a certain vocabulary to that effort. As far as I know, I was the first American diplomat to call on Abdullah Gul, who is now Prime Minister of Turkey. Anyway, so that was a concern. Another big concern with Iraq. And one of the things that I did in the Embassy was to persuade the Ambassador to convene an all-day meeting of all of the elements of the U.S. Mission, the military, the less public types, what have you, the information service, everybody. Just to talk about who they were and what they did with regard to Iraq, because it was quite clear that Iraqi was taking up staggering amounts of our time. Now what do I mean by that? I mean a number of things, on the political-military side, Operation Provide Comfort, the effort by, initially the United Kingdom and the United States and France, France, remember this...

Q: And France was actually almost an initiator, it was Mrs...

Library of Congress

MCKEE: Mrs. Mitterrand.

Q: Mitterrand who was the driving force behind that. MCKEE: She had a very soft spot in her heart for the Kurds, for reasons that probably don't belong on this tape. But anyway, yes, and so that was a complicated thing, because of course there was the whole military logistical aspect to it, there was indeed also a very lively domestic and foreign-political aspect to it, because of course this effort protected the Kurds. And one element of the Kurds at that time was in full revolt against the government of Turkey, the PKK-led combination insurgency/terrorist effort. So that took up a lot of time. Operation Provide comfort took up time on the economic side; there were NGOs, charitable groups in the States and Europe who were doing all kinds of good things in northern Iraq in the zone that was protected by Operation Provide Comfort. We were trying to get the two Kurdish factions together, the Talibani faction and Barzani faction, so that the government in the protected area of northern Iraq could be seen as democratic, as not corrupt, as effective in terms of providing social services. In other words, as a counter-point to the government in Baghdad, which was of course none of those things. The Turks were very suspicious of this effort. It looked to them like nation-building, and they weren't interested in building up anything that would look like a Kurdish nation, so we had lots of things to do. I should also point out that the PKK, and I insist that theirs was an insurgency/terrorist effort, was obviously a very complicating factor. We had been much more forthright perhaps than the Europeans. We had condemned the PKK as a terrorist organization. The Europeans did not do so. We do not have a large Kurdish population in our country, the Germans particularly do have a large Kurdish population in theirs. So there was, there was all of that. There were many other elements including, for example, the Caucasus the whole question of the Turkish role and the American role and the Russian role and others' roles in trying to resolve the tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The other really big thing during my tenure was the effort to get the Turks into a European Customs Union. In other words, the European Union would sign a free trade agreement with Turkey. We accomplished it at Christmastime of 1995, I think I have the date right, anyway. That

Library of Congress

was a big plus for our relations. Not full membership for Turkey in the EU, but customs arrangements. The customs union would have been more beneficial had the Greeks not blocked the full implementation of the incentives for Turkey. Cyprus was a continuing concern, Greek-Turkish relations were a continuing concern, there was a dustup over of an uninhabited island, Kardak, for, I think the Greeks' Ikizley, which means 'twins' for the Turks, the only way that that one was solved was by direct American intervention. All in all it was a very lively time. I traveled a lot around Turkey and enjoyed traveling immensely.

Q: Well let's pick up some of these items, let's pick up dealing with the Islamist party. Was it a, did you find you were having to sort of turn the political section around to go out, or was this, to go out and make better contacts with the Islamist, or were the Islamists not wanting contact with them, or..?

MCKEE: Well first of all, in terms of my own political section, there was no problem. I had such brilliant officers as Janice Weiner, whose Turkish was so good. She was the human rights officer. When she conducted interviews with human rights abuse victims she needed no interpreter, which changed the whole context of the interview. The problems in reaching out to the Islamists were, first of all, to a little extent within the Embassy. Dick Barkley particularly, for whom dealing with Islamists was just simply not in his background, was very cautious. Certainly our secularist contacts among the Turks were very suspicious of our reaching out to the Islamists, and there were people in the States who were very suspicious of this effort as well, I must confess I was encouraged a bit by a visit of Mrs. Albright. When she was Permanent Representative to the UN, she came out to Turkey. She convened one of those, frankly for my money, rather hokey town meeting kinds of things at the Embassy. One of the comments that she made in speaking to the Embassy staff, including FSNs, was that she was happy that the Embassy was reaching out to the opposition because during the Reagan and Bush years, when she had been in the opposition in the United States, she was flattered when diplomats came to call on her. So I thought that was very nice. So the opposition was more on the side of, as I say, the secularists, to cast broadly, than the Islamists. The Islamists were intrigued that the

Library of Congress

Americans were interested in them, a little bit apprehensive, there were certainly one or two who were deeply suspicious, but on the whole they were flattered and intrigued.

Q: Obviously we had all been bitten by the Iranian bug and Khomeini's taking over. And we had to be using that as a yardstick and figuring out what Islam was becoming. Where did we figure that Turkish Islamists were?

MCKEE: Well, it was a difficult time, because there were some Islamic terrorist groups running around Turkey, and some of them had support in various ways from the Iranian Embassy. Some of these groups had killed Americans, so that was certainly a concern. My own view, which I think was the prevalent view in the Embassy was, if I could be crude for a minute, reflected in old LBJ line about the difference between a caucus and a cactus. You know, in a caucus, the pricks are on the inside, and with a cactus the pricks are on the outside... anyway, that's not a very good analogy, it probably should be dropped. The Islamist party was participating in the democratic and parliamentary systems in Turkey with all of their flaws. They were established by the Constitution of 1983. In other words, it was better to have this Islamist sentiment channeled into this peaceful electoral effort, rather than isolated, and therefore have it go underground and perhaps erupt in very violent and bloody ways.

Q: I noted with, at the time there was tremendous concern about women and head scarves and universities, which all struck me as, you know, we, how did we view that at the time? And other outward signs of...

MCKEE: It's important to understand that, in the Muslim world, how people dress is tremendously important. How people dress can indicate such things as which branch of Islam they belong to, whether or not people are descended from the prophet, whether or not they have gone on Hajj to Makkah, and obviously the status of women is very important. But it's more than that, I mean the fact is that one of Ataturk's reforms was the shapka reform. "Shapka," is a word meaning cap. It comes actually from the Russian.

Library of Congress

He decreed that Turkish men would not wear turbans anymore, that they would wear European style caps, and this meant the abolition of the Ottoman fez. It is also illegal for members of the Turkish armed forces or the civil bureaucracy to wear beards, and I think mustaches as well. You must be clean shaven. So in other words it's not only women that are involved in all of these dress restrictions, but also men. Certainly on the secular side, on the military side, on the Turkish republican side, the rules were very strict. Women could not cover their hair if they were to appear in Parliament, if they were to appear in court, if they were to teach and study at the state universities. If they were to enter any government building. This, for my money, worked a tremendous hardship. I'm indebted to Murat Mercan, who is now the Deputy Chairman of the ruling party, the Ak Party, now they call it the Justice and Development Party. Murat got his doctorate in the States, I think in Florida, taught here for some years. His wife was a delightful lady who has a master's degree from the States. He has been sort of the number two to Abdullah Gul for many years. He's now the number two man in the ruling party. Murat, pointed out to me one day that if a devout Muslim woman who interprets the faith as requiring that her hair be covered is the mother/sister/wife/daughter over age twelve or fourteen or something, of a Turkish soldier who is wounded and is in one of the military hospitals, major ones in Ankara, she cannot visit the wounded soldier in the hospital unless she uncovers her hair. This rule places her in an impossible position. It's that kind of thing I think that in a lot of ways fuels the Islamist vote. The other thing that fuels the Islamist vote is the corruption and unresponsiveness of the secular parties. So this is a big thing, that a woman who actually turned out to be an American citizen was elected to Parliament on the Islamist party ticket. And she wore her head scarf into parliament, it created a huge uproar, and she was basically thrown out. Merve, I can't remember her last name, Kavakci. So this was a tremendous issue.

Q: Well, did we overtly, covertly, I think that's the wrong term, I mean were we telling the Turkish government, you know, this doesn't work very... or did we just stay out of it?
McKEE: As I say, it's complicated. In the, as I mentioned, Christmas of '95 elections, the

Library of Congress

Islamists came in first. After a lot of backing and filling trying to create coalitions of one kind or another, a coalition did come to power in the summer of '96, led by Mr. Erbakan, the leader of the Islamist party, with Tansu Ciller as his deputy, the coalition between those two parties. Now Erbakan was a veteran, old time Islamist. He did frankly a lot of symbolic things which were silly and upset the military and upset the middle class secularists and led to his demise after a year as a leader of the coalition. He visited Libya, he visited Iran, he didn't really need to do those things. He talked about building a mosque in Taksim Square, which is the great republican square in Istanbul. In January of '97 the National Security Council recommended a whole range of things for the government to do, the implementation of which essentially would have meant that the Erbakan's Islamist Refah Party would have had to betray its principles. The tension between the National Security Council, essentially the military and his government rose. His government fell in, I think, June of '97, just as I was preparing to leave Turkey. The United States in all this was sort of on one foot and on the other. We thought that parliamentary democracy was a good thing, so therefore we were not happy with the efforts that were mounted by the secularists to declare the Refah Party illegal, which efforts eventually succeeded. We were given the things like saying we support democracy and secularism. Well, that's wonderful, except in Turkey in '96, '97, and some would argue to the present day, these two principles may be in conflict, and then what do you do? I don't think we've sort of sorted that one out, yet.

Q: Did, on the human rights, I think I was asking you about human rights.

MCKEE: Well, you didn't, but that was a major concern the entire time I was there. The Turks tend to promise more than they can deliver on human rights. It's certainly true of Tansu Ciller, and Mesut Yilmaz, who was her Deputy Prime Minister. Complicated issue, various aspects to it. The Turkish constitution and the Turkish legal structure reflecting fear of disturbances stirred up by religion and by ethnic confrontations. They place very severe constraints on freedom of speech. There was the particular problem of the Kurds. Turkey for a long time denied that there were any Kurds, in the country; in fact there are twelve to fifteen million of them. And then finally Turkish leaders said yes, there are Kurds,

Library of Congress

they're not "mountain Turks," but you know, they're all assimilated. We've had presidents and generals and ministers who are Kurdish, all of which is true. But at the same time the Kurdish language was forbidden to be used, or was until very, very recently. Certainly during my term it was forbidden in print, which I think is a violation of the Lausanne Treaty, which essentially created modern Turkey in terms of international law. And the denial of cultural rights to the Kurds was really in a lot of ways the proximate cause of the PKK effort. On the other hand, the Kurds have been revolting off and on for the last hundred and fifty years against Turkish rule. There was a somewhat separate question of torture, police torture, torture in police cells. Torture by the Jandarma, particularly the intelligence arm of the Jandarma. The Jandarma are a semi-military rural police force. Their lower ranks are separate from the Army, but their senior ranks are filled by officers on loan from the Army. And certainly there was torture by the counterterrorist branch of the police, which again was a separate elite group that really operated with impunity. It was an area where we continued to press. Here I think again Marc Grossman gets full marks. The Europeans would just say "we detest you, you're engaged in human rights abuses, this has got to stop." Ambassador Grossman scratched around and came up with public and private money to help the police with things like training and forensics. Their forensics capability was pathetic. He provided a technological alternative to beating, so that the police don't have to beat confessions out of people, as they had done for I guess centuries in Turkey. Now this is not a full answer, you also need political will from the top and you also need patience, because you're talking about very deep cultural behavior patterns, but I thought that Ambassador Grossman deserved full marks for essentially looking at alternatives and encouraging Turks to think in new ways about getting rid of torture. He was also very straightforward in talking to all Turks, including Turks in uniform, about the need for human rights reform. He was also very blunt in saying 'Look, you Turks can make the sequential argument that we cannot do anything about human rights until we defeat the PKK terrorism,' then he said, 'It's not sequential, it's parallel, you've gotta do both things at the same time, as hard as that is.' And I remember a Turkish member of Parliament telling me that it was very difficult for him to advocate human rights reforms,

Library of Congress

when he had to go back to his constituency and appear at funerals of nineteen-year-old kids who had been killed fighting the PKK down in southeastern Turkey. If you advocate human rights reforms in that environment, the people assembled for the funeral simply see it as apologizing for terrorism.

Q: Did the Armenian lobby and the massacre of Armenians keep cropping up?

MCKEE: Once a year. In April. I can't remember the exact date, but it's the Armenian Commemoration of godawful things. On that occasion the Congress, by an overwhelming majority, passes resolutions.

Q: Our congress...

MCKEE: Our Congress, and press, and the various people there, meaning Armenian-Americans, would press the White House to issue a statement on the Armenian massacres using the word 'genocide.' That's one of those words that really sets off the Turks, and so we would have our annual confrontation about that. As we had our annual confrontation on the human rights report. The Turkish Government was very cooperative as we worked to put together the human rights report. In some ways they got sandbagged, because we used their material, and they didn't look good. The Turkish section of the annual human rights report was longer than that on almost any other country. In a lot of ways it pays countries where human rights are abused not to cooperate with the U.S. Government, because basically the U.S. Government then sandbags them. On that particular question of the Armenian massacre, the President did not ever during the years I was there use the word 'genocide'. It's a very complicated question. For my money the historical case is unproven one way or another. There's no question that millions of Armenians died, there is no question that a lot of Turks died, there's no question that there was a series of bad harvests, there's no question that Turkey was at war with Russia, there's no question that some Armenians collaborated with the Russians. The real question is whether the Ottoman government, actually it was the "Young Turk"

Library of Congress

government, ordered the expulsion and massacre of the Armenians. That's, for my money still not clear.

Q: Did we have any contact with, what should we call, the Armenian party or something of that nature?

MCKEE: There are very few Armenians now left in Turkey. There are several thousand still in Istanbul, almost all of them.

Q: How about with the Kurds? Was there a legitimate Kurdish party?

MCKEE: There was a legitimate Kurdish party, and at one point in alliance with other parties in the early '90s, it had representation in Parliament. Under the Constitution it is illegal for any party to be based on religious or ethnic origins. But everybody in this one party was, essentially Kurdish. The Supreme Court just declared it illegal, and it reappeared in a new guise, as often happened. This happened maybe half a dozen times in the '90s. Similarly there was a newspaper which was published in Turkish, which was the pro-Kurdish newspaper, and it would be closed down and then it would reappear with a new title.

Q: In Turkey itself with the Kurds, were they suffering from strange diseases that seem to affect the Kurds in Iraq and Iran, splundering and...

MCKEE: Oh, absolutely. My line about the Kurds is that whenever three Kurds get together, two will plot against the third one, who will call in outside assistance. It's something that you see in a lot of cultures where you have essentially mountain tribal people. They're very shortsighted, they can't see into the next valley, they certainly have a lot of trouble seeing any kind of larger national cause, and this makes it extremely easy for outsiders to prey on the divisions, exacerbate the divisions that are already there. That's certainly true in the case of the Kurds in Iraq and of Turkey. I know much less about the Kurds in Iran, Syria.

Library of Congress

Q: What about the Cyprus thing? The Greek lobby has always been the mar of our relations with Turkey. During your time, how did that work?

MCKEE: Well, thank God the strictly military aspects of it were the concern of the Political Military section of the Embassy. I didn't have to get into that, but there were a number of elements there. The first one was the question of the territorial seas in the Aegean. If you accept the Greek claim then in many ways the Aegean was simply barred to Turkey. There was the question of undersea rights. You have to remember that some of these islands are visible from the Turkish shore. They're very close together. But there's that question of overflights. There was the huge question of Cyprus, and the fact that you had the government of Cyprus recognized internationally, including by us, and then you had the area in the north that was recognized only by Turkey. You had a very high level of armaments on both sides. You had a U.N. mission which had really gone nowhere since 1974. This also flowed into the whole question of EU entry for Turkey, because Cyprus was also a candidate for EU membership and the Turks were very sensitive about this. It's often complicated. It took up a fair amount of time, not as much time as Iraq, but yes, trying to keep Turkish-Greek relations on some kind of an even keel, took up a fair amount of time.

Q: What about the island problem? I've interviewed Tom Niles, who was our Ambassador to Greece at the time, but you had this uninhabited island...MCKEE: My memory is that there was, you know, there was a Greek politician from the islands who wanted to make a name for himself, so he and some journalists went over and planted a Greek flag on this island. Now, this is one that the Turks has always considered theirs. You go back to varying interpretations of the Treaty of Paris. This became, quite a bitter controversy between the two countries, and they almost went to war over it. It took the intervention of the U.S. government for them to back down. It's interesting, the European Union could do nothing.

Library of Congress

Q: This is something that crops up today, we, you know, the European Union talks as though it were a real entity, and in some ways it is, but in Foreign Affairs in Bosnia it was hopeless, and this, they don't seem to be able to, I mean, how were we seeing Europeans dealing with this vis a vis Turkey from your vantage point during that period?

MCKEE: Well, I think you're actually right. The Europeans tried to speak with one voice on a whole range of foreign policy issues and rarely succeeded in doing so. We engaged in major efforts, successful, to have the Turks and the European Union conclude a customs agreement. The Europeans in their dealings with Turkey, first of all, had to think of the fact that there is a large and essentially unassimilated Turkish minority in a number of countries, primarily Germany. They had to deal with the fact that there's a lot of history there. The "terrible Turk" is a phrase that goes back to the Bulgarian massacres in the 1870s, when the liberal prime minister in Britain was horrified by that. For some people it goes back to the siege of Vienna, the two sieges of Vienna, actually, it must have been 1683. There are certainly Europeans who think of Europe as a Christian continent, and the European Union is in many ways a Christian organization. The Turks know this, and they resent it. I must say there are also a lot of Europeans who see very solid economic and even political reasons to bring Turkey into the European Union. Anyway, the Europeans resented our pressure to them on behalf of the Turks. On the other hand, I've gotta confess that over the years I've become less enamored of the Europeans. I gave dinner parties at which European diplomats seated at the table with Turkish diplomats talked about Turkey and about Turks as if the Turkish diplomats were simply not in the room. Now Lord knows the United States has had its racial and ethnic problems over the years, but there's a level of racial arrogance in Europe which far, far exceeds that which foreigners are likely to experience in the U.S. When we were putting this European Union customs agreement together, the Spanish were the presidents of the EU for the crucial six months. We worked together very carefully, closely, properly and successfully with them.

Library of Congress

Q: How did corruption affect, from our perspective, how did the corruption, and what form was it taking and how did it affect the effectiveness of the Turkish government?

MCKEE: Well, regarding the effectiveness of the Turkish government, I think the problem there with corruption was that really many, many, many Turks were simply alienated from their own government. This corruption was just sort of additional proof that this government was really not legitimate. The '83 constitution was adopted under pretty dubious circumstances, so that just really made things worse. Corruption affected the bilateral relationship in that U.S. investment in Turkey was surprisingly small given the size of the Turkish economy. American investors just didn't want to go to a place that was rife with inflation and had corruption problems on top of it.

Q: Did you see the government while you were there being able to deal with this, was there any interest here?

MCKEE: You have to say that the government didn't really care very much. I certainly don't remember any common bureaucrats or what have you being hauled up on corruption charges. As an example of this, one of the conditions under which the coalition government, led by Erbalcan and supported by Tansu Ciller came into power in summer '96 was simply that her parliamentarians would vote to absolve the Islamist party of pending corruption charges, and the Islamist deputies agreed to vote to absolve Tansu Ciller and her party of pending corruption charges. Any government created under these circumstances cannot inspire confidence.

Q: How did you find dealing with Turkish officials?

MCKEE: Wonderful. I respected the Turkish officials I dealt with, primarily the Foreign Ministry, but also the President's office, which is staffed to some extent by Turkish Foreign Service people. Straightforward, professional, unemotional, in comparison with frankly, the Arabs. I think really a lot of them were very sympathetic to the United States. There were

Library of Congress

some attitudinal problems - they tended to try to play us off against the Europeans, which wasn't really a very profitable game for Turkey. They certainly contested the legitimacy of human rights as a subject for discussions between diplomats Janice Wiener, our Human Rights Officer suffered for that. But I was quite happy to defend her, and I did. And I defended the legitimacy of what we were doing. But overall the Turks are very good.

Q: Were we sort of carrying the Turkish water, trying to get them more integrated into the European Union?

MCKEE: Oh, yes, absolutely. No question about it, we thought that it would be a good thing for Turkey and a good thing for Europe if Turkey would join the European Union. There were a lot of reasons for this. Oddly enough, a lot of economists said at the time about the customs agreement that it really wasn't a good thing for U.S. trade and investment. It would make European goods and companies more competitive in Turkey at the expense of U.S. trade and investment. But I think we look at it very broadly Turkey is very important Muslim majority country to the west. I noticed that some European diplomats, particularly from the Mediterranean countries, Italy and Spain and maybe even Greece, some of them, think that it would be a very good thing essentially if the European Union had a Muslim interlocutor with the Muslim states. They of course are all across the southern border, on the other side of the Mediterranean from Europe. So, yes, we certainly did carry a lot of water for the Turks.

Q: Is there anything else we should discuss, do you think, during the time you were there?

MCKEE: I think we've pretty well covered the waterfront.

Q: Well one other question, there was a political military officer, but if you're dealing with political affairs, you have to keep an eye on the Turkish military. They're a 300 pound gorilla. How did you work this? Was your political military counselor, was he looking at the political aspects, did you get together, how did you deal with this?

Library of Congress

MCKEE: There were three political military counselors during the three years I was there. It's unfortunate, most of them were just getting started really when their tours ended. Bruce Thomas, the last one, was particularly talented, but they were all good officers. In the Defense Attach#s office there was and as far as I know is a guy named Bob Pistana. He is a retired Lieutenant Colonel from the U.S. Army who has spent most of his adult life in Turkey. He's a graduate of the Harp Akademesi - the Military Academy - and he speaks Turkish. He has lots and lots of contacts among the Turkish military. I relied very heavily on Bob for the political aspects of what military officers were thinking. But also, you know, the Foreign Service training dies hard. I looked around in the Turkish Parliament, and found one or two retired generals who'd gone into politics and were members of Parliament. I went to call on them and some of them gave me some very valuable insight into how senior military officers looked at Turkish politics, the United States, what have you.

Q: Were we concerned that at some point, given the corruption problem and all, Turkish military might step in again? MCKEE: I think that we were concerned during the Erbakan government, which as I said blundered from one symbolic gesture to another, all of which frosted the military. We worried that the military might conceivably step in again, and frankly that would have had an unimaginably bad impact on Turkish relations with us and Turkish relations with the Europeans. Certainly, in the spring of 1997, there were concerns that that could happen.

Q: Well then you left there in '97.

MCKEE: I did indeed.

Q: Where'd you go then?

MCKEE: I had bid for two positions, because I knew I had only a year left in the Service, either the Inspection Corps, or the Examiners, Board of Examiners. The Board of

Library of Congress

Examiners called half an hour before the Inspectors called, each offering a job, and because the Examiners called first I was an examiner for a year.

Q: How did you find that?

MCKEE: It was a lot of fun. It was a wonderful way for somebody who's spent most of his adult life overseas to reconnect with all the stresses and strains and glories and agonies of the U.S. society. All the tensions, for example, about affirmative action came to rest very directly in the Board of Examiners. During the year that I did it, '97 to '98, it was not heavy lifting. There were, frankly, very few candidates running around.

Q: But this is, this is a period of posterity as regards to...

MCKEE: Whatever, they hadn't given the written exam. I remember particularly the last several months of it - there was almost nothing to do. I enjoyed it very much.

Q: What was your impression of how they handled the diversity issue there?

MCKEE: There certainly were no specific check-offs or quotas or anything like that which are quite illegal. We were happy that the recruitment side of the house which was co-located with us in Rosslyn, was making this real effort to reach out to historically black colleges and otherwise to make the recruitment process as open as possible. I suspect that in conducting what was called the oral assessment, the oral exam. No-one's free of prejudice, and I suspect that I leaned a little bit in favor of minority candidates. One thing I did notice, and it's something that's been bothering me ever since, is this. Despite the best efforts of all concerned in the oral assessment process despite the examiners' trying to approach everything afresh, candidates who have had an internship at the State Department or at an Embassy overseas, frankly have a hell of an advantage over people who have not had that opportunity. We have to be clear here. The ability of a student or graduate student to take a summer, or my God, even six months off and take an unpaid internship is directly related to the economic situation in which those persons find

Library of Congress

themselves. And I know the examiners, my colleagues, did try, in the part of the exam where the candidate is just supposed to think quickly on his or her feet about how he or she would handle a consular or cultural or administrative problem tried not to think about their own experiences in judging the candidates' responses. But nonetheless, the kids that had actually been in an embassy just simply had a huge advantage.

Q: Well, they understood the environment.

MCKEE: They understood the environment.

Q: Well then, in '98 you retired?

MCKEE: Why don't you use the English language correctly? I was retired, I was selected out, I had not been promoted. Fairly early on in my career I decided that I would do what I really like to do, and what I thought I was good at, which was learning languages, getting into societies overseas, figuring out how they worked, relating their domestic politics to U.S. foreign policy concerns, Talking to people, reading, analyzing, writing and reporting. I was not a very good bureaucrat in Washington, and indeed spent as little time as possible in Washington. If I'd structured my career differently to the extent that any officer can structure his or her career differently, perhaps I would have done better. On the other hand, the Foreign Service gave me thirty-four well-remunerated years, I had enough money to raise my kids and educate them nicely, I had a lot of fun, and I really left with almost no regrets. I did go back after six months. They asked me to go back and analyze terrorism as a civilian, as a civil servant in INR, I did that very happily, but that was a coda to my Foreign Service career. It enabled me to work in INR. which I had never done as a Foreign Service Officer. I got to know something about areas about which I knew almost nothing, like Russia and Eastern Europe, and I collected from the CIA an exceptional performance award for something I had written on the Caucasus, and unlike State, the CIA gave me five hundred bucks, too. And on that note...

Library of Congress

Q: *We'll close at this. Well, thank you very much.*

End of interview